THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy & Science Fiction

FEBRUARY 1952

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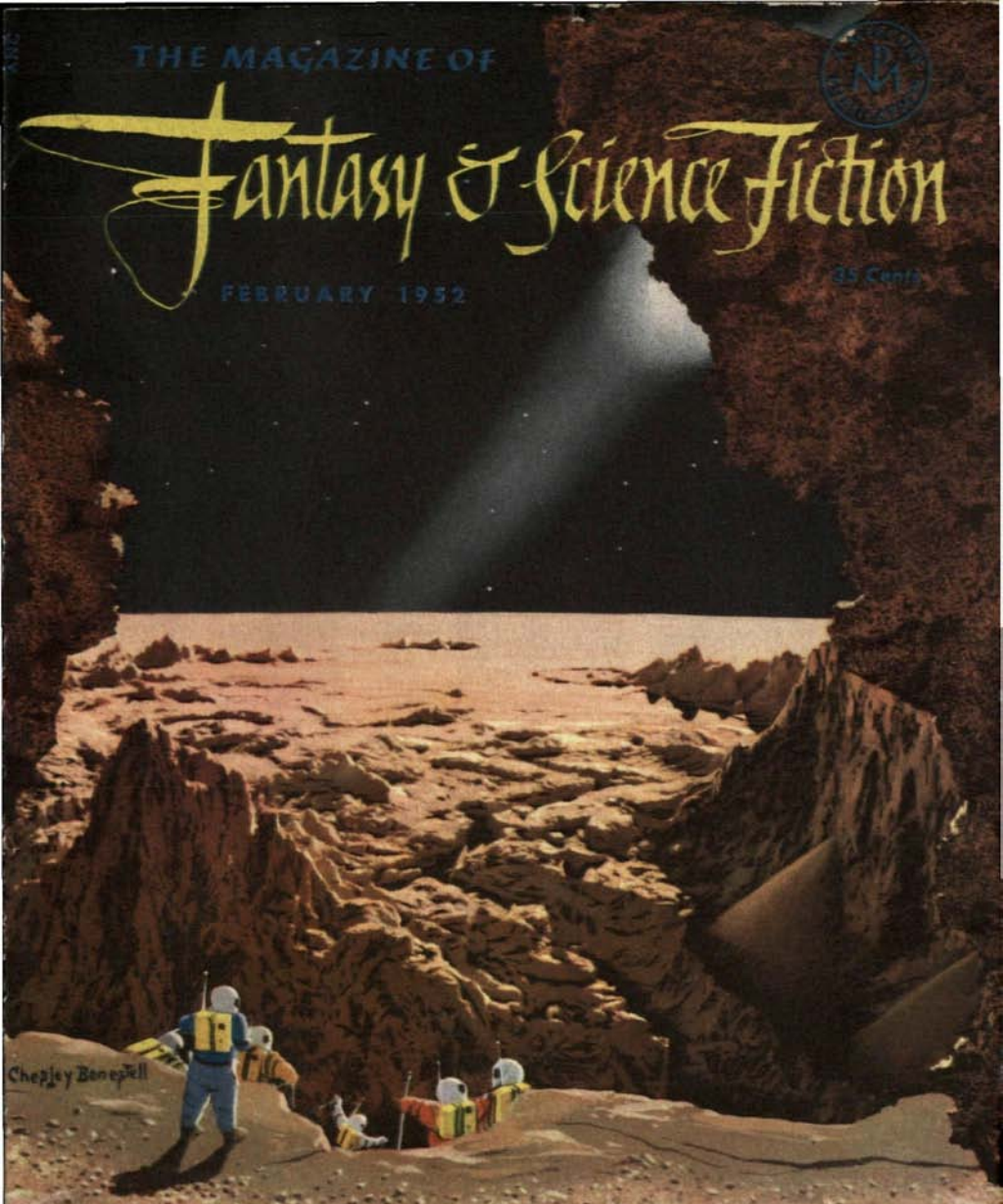

Ugly Sister — JAN STRUTHER
The Pedestrian — RAY BRADBURY
Mrs. Poppledore's Id — R. BRETNOR
The Hole in the Moon — IDRIS SEABRIGHT

A selection of the best stories of fantasy and science fiction, new and old

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 3, No. 1 FEBRUARY, 1952

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Cover illustration by Chesley Bonestell (Exploring the moon)

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 3, No. 1, February, 1952. Published bimonthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, $2.00 in U. S. and possessions; $2.50 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. *Copyright, 1951, by Fantasy House, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved.* *Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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WHEN AN EXPERT SAYS IT . . . !

P. Schuyler Miller, outstanding Science Fiction writer, says: "FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION was finished at a sitting. This is IT!"

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THE MAGAZINE OF Fantasy and Science Fiction brings you in its next issue (on the stands in mid-February) *H. Nearing Jr.'s* THE ACTINIC ACTOR, in which Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom stars in history's strangest performance of "*Hamlet.*" Other features will include —

Elizabeth Bowen's THE CHEERY SOUL, in which one of the foremost living women of letters brings off the hardest trick in fantasy by writing a really funny ghost story;

Richard Matheson's SRL AD, in which one of the brightest young writers treats interplanetary love in a new kind of interplanetary prose;

plus a different type of fantasy-detective story by *Anthony Boucher;* an *F&SF* "first" by *C. A. Barnett;* stories by *Eric Linklater, Alfred Coppel, Kay Rogers* and others; a new contribution to the Bureau of Imaginary Zoölogy by *Alan E. Nourse;* and a detailed survey by your editors of the status of fantasy book publishing in 1951.

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As hard a task as a science fiction writer can set himself is the consistent, convincing depiction of an alien mentality — which is at once most effective and most difficult when written purely from the alien point of view. H. B. Fyfe's last appearance in F&SF was with an all-out farce, The Well-Oiled Machine *(December, 1950); this time he offers a sober and ironic story of Earth's first contact with a feudal society on a remote planet — and a perfect technical model of how to present a comprehensive and comprehending picture of another race with a complete abstention from direct exposition.*

Ransom

by H. B. FYFE

It was the day after Theot-Tu tried to kidnap me that I first saw the Earth beings who landed in my fields. At that time, I did not know they called themselves of Earth and came from the stars — in fact, their ship was not even to be seen from the castle because of the giant ferns to the south.

Theot-Tu had time in the dungeon to learn who was a fool. My rear guard had caught him fleeing the unsuccessful ambush.

"Very well, Kahkaw!" he gasped. "Two of my best row-ships and fifty slaves to work them."

I motioned the attendants of the place to put aside the hot chains and pincers. Theot-Tu was not the warrior he used to be, giving up the ships before I had so much as plucked a single feather from his head. I was rather disappointed.

Just then, a slave was hustled in by a pair of warriors. From the way the wing-muscles anchored to his breastbone quivered, I could see he was bursting with news. The philosophers claim the bone-ridges on our backs were free wings long, long ago and that our prehistoric ancestors could fly. This fellow seemed as if he might, at any moment. I pointed a claw at Theot-Tu.

"Take him out the rear gate and give him a *zinph* to ride back to his castle," I ordered. "I do not mean to doubt your given word, Theot-Tu, but I shall keep your warriors to work for me until the row-ships arrive."

He flung me an insulted glare at that, but prudently swallowed his protests.

Upstairs, the slave blurted out his story.

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". . . and when I approached, two more came out of the ship, making seven. They brought a small machine. Believe me, Lord Kahkaw! With the machine, before I knew, they spoke to me, though they talked a wondrous strange gabble among themselves. Believe me!"

"Enough!" I commanded, turning to the warriors. "This I would see. Bring *zinphs* to the courtyard and find if any of my offspring are about, to accompany me!"

They located Turrrt and Hoo-Wup, the others being out hunting. Hoo-Wup, I noticed, was growing to be a handsome fellow with bulging muscles beneath his tanned skin. His crest feathers had a fine, blue-green sheen. But I had trained Turrrt myself, and knew him more reliable with lance or blowgun.

We rode out with ten warriors, the slave running before to show the way. It was not far. We crossed the river by the stone bridge, then bore seaward for the trail through the ferns. When we came out into the light again, there it was.

I looked at the panting slave, who had flung himself down to rest, but decided he had meant well enough. I, however, could see that it was not exactly a ship, though it lay high on the dunes along the beach.

At my wave, the warriors spread out and we rode forward. Before we reached this big thing of shining metal, a gate opened in its flank and some Earth beings came out. Immediately, I knew they were not of this world, unless they were evil spirits.

One of the warriors raised his blowgun, but I motioned him back. It is always good to learn a new thing. It might add to one's wealth or help in holding castle and lands.

It was as the slave had said. One of them brought out a machine in a small box, and then they could talk back to me.

"How do you do that?" I asked, seeking to put them at ease by pretending they knew more than I.

"We analyzed the speech of your companion this morning," one answered. "The machine translates as we speak into it."

He was a husky fellow, but his skin was pale and his face strange. He had no crest at all, just a sort of brownish down covering a big round head; and the soft-looking lump shaped almost like a beak was really not his mouth at all.

I glared into his bluish eyes — which both faced squarely forward — but decided he had meant no insult.

"He is not Kahkaw's companion," I said. "He is my slave."

Alien as he was, he had the wit to apologize. His name was Bill-something-or-other, and the others had similar funny sounds for names. They told me

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about their flight from their star to our world, and in such detail that I was of half a mind to believe them.

As they talked, I examined them. They were built somewhat like us — shorter and flatter in the body but longer in the legs. Their claws were soft and I do not think they *ever* had wings or feathers. Two were about as tall as I, one quite small, and the other four were in between.

The little one, which I took to be half-grown, had very long, thick, black down hanging down the neck to the shoulders. The ones of medium size had short thatches of different colors — brown, yellowish, and even red — and were sturdier, like warriors. The two big ones hung to the rear and never changed expression. They seemed to wear metal suits and masks.

"And why have you come here?" I asked Bill, when he had told his tale.

"We are exploring for other worlds with intelligent life."

"For what purpose?" I asked, lest they be spies.

"To exchange wisdom, and perhaps to trade goods."

"What?" I demanded. "Surely you are not mere merchants!"

He hesitated, then said they were not. It sounded like half a truth, but it was not worth a challenge yet.

In the end, I gave permission for them to remain on my land for a time, and to show me their ship the next day — it would be good excuse for a little ride.

Turrrt led up my *zinph*, but before I could mount, something caught my eye. The Earth beings had another small machine, which looked like a long tube sitting on three sticks.

"What is that for?" I asked.

They tried to tell me it was to look at stars so they could explain to others exactly where they were — obviously some kind of sorcery. The brown-topped one, Bill, showed me how to look through it.

By my last egg!

It happened to be pointing along the shore, and a spot half a day's ride away popped into view as though under my castle walls.

They said it was done with curved pieces of glass. Whatever worked it, it was just the thing for my watch tower. With a machine like this, it would be a lucky band who rode across my domain without yielding a juicy ransom. I saw myself becoming the richest lord in the countryside.

But no matter how extravagantly I admired the thing, the boors pretended not to understand, and declined to give it to me.

"Lord!" hissed Hoo-Wup, ashamed. "Must we watch Kahkaw lay himself open to the mockery of these slaves?"

"No!" I answered grimly, turning away to my *zinph*. "If they don't understand that 'a present handsome is advanced ransom,' they will learn it soon!"

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I even said farewell, but my temper stirred as we rode off. At the edge of the ferns, I bade the slave lurk and watch.

Early the next morning, the strategy was rewarded. A runner brought word that two of the aliens were walking on the beach. I summoned Turrrt, Hoo-Wup, and the warriors.

It was so easy it was hardly fun.

We swooped out of the ferns as they plodded back from the river toward their ship. One of the metal-suited ones led the way, carrying many small boxes, and the half-grown one followed. I pointed to the second figure. Turrrt and Hoo-Wup closed in amid a cloud of sand flung up by the claws of their *zinphs*.

A moment later, we were back in the dark of the ferns. The prisoner's companion did not even try to follow but continued on his way after one glance back at us.

We did not have long to wait. Before the midday meal, two of them showed up at the castle gate. The warriors brought in the brown-topped Bill I had talked with and one of the frozen-faced fellows. That one had the small talking-machine under one shiny, blue-black arm.

I wasted no time in tale-telling. With the warriors behind, we went right down to the dungeon where the little one was chained to the wall.

"Why did you do this?" cried Bill. "What do you want? Whatever you like — just name it. If I can manage at all, you shall have it!"

"You should have spoken this way yesterday," I reproved him, "instead of being so rude."

There was a great deal of babble over so simple a matter, what with the one in the cell crying out to the ones not yet in, and so on; but when I mentioned the seeing-machine, they agreed promptly.

I assured them I would not for the world doubt their word, but Bill insisted on remaining while they sent the shiny one off to get the present. Even when I had all the chains and instruments removed from sight, that pair persisted in acting extremely nervous. I had them brought up to the great hall, where they huddled together in a disgusting, weak fashion.

When the seeing-machine was brought, I freed them promptly, as befitted my honor as lord of the district. Then we took the machine up to the watch tower. May I lay a square egg! It was marvelous!

I had a watch kept on the ship the next day. They went about their foolish business of looking at the plants of the fields and the wiggling things along the beach.

It was then that it occurred to me I had been too modest in my requests. The seeing-machine was all very well, but what if I could make them carry me and my warriors through the air in their ship!

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Some might laugh at that idea, but I am known as a lord with rare imagination. I pictured Theot-Tu's wide eyes when our band dropped straight down into his courtyard to earn another pair of row-ships.

Accordingly, I sent Turrrt and Hoo-Wup forth to catch another one. Knowing the obvious deep bonds between these Earth beings, I anticipated no complications.

Shortly before dark, they brought in the one with the red head. He had performed very defiantly, obliging them to lay a lance-butt across his crest. We waited for one to come with the talking-machine. Sure enough, the yellow-crested one arrived with the darkness.

"*Now* what do you want?" he asked in a manner I deemed insolent.

For the moment, I overlooked that. I informed him of my desire. To my indignation, the pair of them flatly refused!

"You may not understand what will happen," I warned them.

"We can't help what you do," said the red one. "The others would never think of giving up the ship, nor would we ask them!"

The argument lasted a long time. Of course, I might have brought it to an end by other means, but I rather liked the stupid fellows. They acted more like warriors than the first pair. They also sounded as if they were telling the truth about planning to fly off the next night and the others' being willing to abandon them.

"But the last time," I objected, "I got prompt results."

"Oh," said the red-thatched one, "that was only because Ellen is Bill's wife. He couldn't leave *her*. But they can run the ship without us."

"What is a wife?" I asked, waving back Turrrt, who thought they were mocking.

"What's a wife? What do we have to do — tell you the facts of life?"

"You are in a poor place to joke," I told him sternly. "And I'll have you know I have as many offspring as the next."

"Well, then, you know what a wife is," he persisted. "How did you get your children and who brought them up?"

"You stupid *zinph!* They cracked out of their shells by themselves!" I roared. "And *I* brought them up! *Who else?*"

The next thing I knew, he was trying to tell me that on their world, it took more than one individual to make a living egg. I admit I did not swallow all of it, but clearly there was need of beating them at their own game of wits. Besides, I remembered that there *did* seem to be several kinds of them.

Turrrt wanted to fling them into the fire, and Hoo-Wup ranted about hot chains; but I overruled them both. The story must be an allegory — plain if it could be solved — and they *had*, after all, borne themselves boldly as warriors should.

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I let them go, taking them on *zinphs* across the river to the beach, and accepting no other present than a little machine they had for making light in the dark without burning anything.

"You are losing your wits," grumbled Turrrt on the ride back. "I shall soon be lord of the castle if you keep on."

"Patience!" I answered. "I want them to think I have given up the idea, but I am still plotting a way!"

I thought long about how they obtained their offspring, till it began to seem there might be something to it. I remembered that we have little animals in the jungles and some swimming-things in the sea whose eggs have never been seen — yet which multiply in vaster numbers than seems possible. And too, these Earth beings did look varied.

I had had two varieties in my dungeon, but only the first time had I held all of any one kind. . . .

That must be the answer, I decided.

Shortly after dawn the next day, we rode out again. I was sure that I would out-trick them this time.

The little one called Ellen was not seen; but we lurked in the ferns until we caught together the other two I wanted. The red-headed one was with them, ordering them about with burdens, but my warriors drove him off.

"Do not hurt him!" I called. "I may need him in the ship."

Then we started to load the prisoners on the backs of the led *zinphs*. There was a great bustle, but my fellows were terribly slow about it. At last, five warriors heaved one of the aliens across the pack-pad and tied him down. He just kept moving his legs as if he still walked.

"How many arms have you broken?" I snapped to Hoo-Wup, as his gang struggled to lift the other one. "Do you want to be here still, knee-deep, when they come from the ship with weapons?"

"He's heavy!" Hoo-Wup gasped. "It's easy to perch up there and sneer down your beak at us. It isn't *your* wing-muscles he's pulling loose!"

My molting azure crest!

I swarmed down from my *zinph* to show him, but I might have saved my dignity. Hoo-Wup was right; the fellow was heavy as stone. It took six of us.

At last, we rode off — and just in time. Even as we slipped into the ferns, some of the Earth beings ran out the gate in the flank of their ship and made loud *bangs* at us. Some things *zzzzmmmmmed* through the ferns all around. Then an object at least the size of my head screamed past to one side, trailing a wake of fire behind it.

"Never mind," I said. "This time I have them between my claws."

We made it to the castle all right. Behind the stone walls, I awaited their next emissary with confidence.

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"There are three kinds of them," I explained to Turrrt. "You remember how soft they were when we had the little Ellen? Now I have all of *this* kind. They will never leave without them!"

"I hope so," he answered dubiously.

"They themselves revealed the reason. It is simple. They must desire offspring as much as we."

I was so sure of this that when the watcher came down to report the Earth ship gone, I thought to cast him into a cell. But it was true! I was in time to see for myself the long trail of flame high in the night sky.

The warriors looked at the two frozen-faced metal wearers when I came in, for they know my temper, but I thought it might be a trick. I decided to wait for the ship to come back.

I am known as a patient lord, when I want to get my way, but they never did come back. Nor could I get anything out of the prisoners. They sat where they were tossed in a corner and ignored us. We had no talking-machine, and so could not understand the clicking and buzzing under their suits.

During that winter, even that stopped; and after a while their iron suits and masks rusted. I think they must have died inside even before Turrrt broke the white-hot pincers on them.

"You and your ideas about their needing many to make one egg!" he shouted in a rage. "The only egg *these* could ever lay would be as hard as your head!"

I am beginning to think he was right.

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If we have an objection to Fletcher Pratt as an anthologist, it is that he suffers from the rarest of anthologists' faults: over-modesty. Sayers, Queen, Derleth, Wollheim, Leinster, Crossen — each of these (to say nothing of Boucher and McComas) has rarely failed to include at least one story of his own in any anthology; but Mr. Pratt's WORLD OF WONDER *(see this month's* Recommended Reading*) is singularly Prattless. This is particularly regrettable since one of the most remarkable "worlds of wonder" in modern imaginative writing is that glorious locus of impossibilities created by Pratt with L. Sprague de Camp: Gavagan's Bar. And even the clients of Mr. Cohan have encountered few more wondrous adventures than this of the engineer and the amulet.*

The Rape of the Lock

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP & FLETCHER PRATT

"MEET MR. ALLEN, Mr. Gillison," said Doc Brenner. "He's an engineer."

Gillison gloomily accepted a hand. "Does he shake for drinks?" he asked. "Make mine a rye and water, Mr. Cohan. Mr. Allen can maybe help us out. Witherwax here is trying to explain the fourth dimension that he read about in a book and we can't understand it."

"But look," said Witherwax. "Suppose I draw a line around my glass there." He reached across the bar, wet his finger on the brass grating where Mr. Cohan set beer glasses after filling them from the tap, and drew a line around his cocktail glass. "A two-dimensional thing couldn't get past that line without getting wet, but since I'm three-dimensional, I can." He demonstrated by drinking the Martini. "So if I was four-dimensional, I could get around a three-dimensional barrier."

"Like the time my brother Herman locked the combination into the safe," said Mr. Gross. "It was an awful time to do it, because he was supposed to get married that afternoon and the license was in there, too."

Gillison said: "But you're not four-dimensional. Nobody ever saw a four-dimensional man. Or a two-dimensional one, either."

"But Einstein —" said Witherwax.

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"What has Einstein got to do with it?" said Gillison.

"So his partner," continued Gross, "insisted they didn't ought to get one of those safe-opening experts because he'd blow a hole in it, and this safe had cost them a lot of money. So he used to be an opera singer under the name of Felitti before he went into business with my brother Herman, and he said if he could bust a glass with his voice, he could make the safe open by singing at it —"

"He also says the fourth dimension is time," said Witherwax.

Gillison had lost the toss. As Mr. Allen, the engineer, raised his Rob Roy in salute, he said: "Can you do anything about this?" He indicated Witherwax.

"Why, I don't know that it's really necessary," said Allen. "He's quite right as far as he goes. Anything you can measure is a dimension. You can take Time as the first dimension, for instance, and the amount of money in my pocket as the second, and figure out how long I can stand here drinking without going broke."

"That isn't what I mean," said Witherwax.

"Me either," said Gillison. "Mr. Witherwax here says if we could use the fourth dimension we could go places and see things that we can't under ordinary circumstances."

"Oh," said Allen, sipping his drink, and then looking into it as though he expected to find a fish at the bottom. Then: "In the general case, it's quite true that the fourth dimension is a purely mathematical concept, and it isn't even theoretically possible to use it in the way you mention." He gave a nervous little laugh, finished the Rob Roy at a gulp, and signaled for another. "But I have reason to believe that three-dimensional bodies can use the fourth dimension. A funny thing happened."

Gross made one more effort and was shushed by Doc Brenner. Gillison said: "If you're going to claim you can use some kind of formula . . .?"

"No. I'm not. And I only hope it was the fourth dimension. Because if it isn't, there's something going on that — well, I'll tell you, and you see if you can find any explanation. . . ."

About two years ago, I was out East with International Bridge. We were putting in a pipeline in southern Iran, down there where it gets a hundred and twenty in the shade, and there isn't any shade. I guess everyone's tempers got pretty short, but we had a job-paymaster named Mintz, a fat man from Minneapolis, whom the heat hit hardest of all. Well, one Saturday afternoon, I came into the office to find him having a terrific row with old Hamid Abadi, the foreman of the native gang. Hamid wanted the week's money for his men, and was claiming he hadn't received it as usual on Wed-

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nesday, when Mintz was out with dysentery or some sort of collywobbles, and Mintz was saying that the big boss must have given it to him, and Hamid was just trying to collect twice before skipping out with the entire payroll.

Just as I came in the row reached its peak. Mintz flew completely off the handle, called in one of the Persian police and said he wanted Hamid questioned. Now, in case you don't know it, the methods of the Persian police are far from gentle. I didn't blame old Hamid a bit for turning pale at the prospect, but he was only a dirty old gang boss of Arabs, and Mintz the representative of a powerful corporation, so they were about to take him away when I cut in with the suggestion that the office records would show very clearly whether Hamid had been paid or not. Then it developed that the files were locked in the big boss's private safe, and he'd gone off upcountry and wouldn't be back till Tuesday.

Well, I used to be in the Army Counter-Intelligence, you know, and in training for that one of the courses they give you is safe-breaking. I suppose I paid about as much attention to it as the average student, which was enough to get me by. But I did know something about cracking a simple safe with a tumbler lock, and that was the kind the big boss had. So I shooed everybody out of the office except Mintz — he sat there making nasty cracks — and went to work on the safe. I found I had forgotten most of what I knew, so that it took me over two hours. It must have been a fairly unpleasant two hours for Hamid, sitting outside there with that Persian cop licking his chops and just waiting for the opportunity to start pulling out fingernails. But at the end of it, the safe door swung open without any intervention of reaching through the fourth dimension into a three-dimensional object.

In the safe, as you might expect, were not only records showing Hamid Abadi hadn't been paid, but also a memo from the big boss to Mari Sanjari, the secretary, saying, "Be sure to pay Hamid for his gang." Mari had just tucked everything into the safe and slammed the door when the big boss left.

The big point about the affair was Hamid's gratitude. He kissed my hand and wanted to kiss my face, which I didn't like a bit, because he smelled of turmeric. He told me how grateful he was, and pushed into my hand a little gold amulet on a chain. "It open all locked places to you," he said, in his version of English.

The thing is flat and oval, and has on it something that looks like a hand, only it's a pretty crude one, holding something that might be a sword and might be a cross. But if it's a sword, the point is blunt, and if it's a cross, it's being held upside down. There's some lettering on it, what kind I don't

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know; it might have been made by an alcoholic spider leaving footprints.

I thought the gift was a pretty touching expression of the old boy's gratitude. Even the intrinsic value of the gold made it valuable in a place like Iran. But I didn't try to refuse it; that would have been an unbearable insult to a Persian. I simply looped the chain through my own key chain and carried it around as a pocket-piece. With the story of Mintz and the safe-cracking job, it made good cocktail party conversation.

The first time it made anything more was after a cocktail party where I stayed late, had a few drinks too many, and no dinner but the canapés. I confess: I was more than half-seas over, maybe three-quarters. When I got home, I stuck my key in the lock, only I didn't realize till later it wasn't my key, it was the amulet Hamid gave me. The door swung right open. The instant I stumbled through I realized something was wrong.

A gust of rain hit me in the face, and it had been a fine night outside. Moreover, my feet were not on a hardwood floor, but on cobbles, and the night was as black as the inside of a billy goat, with open sky overhead. I want to tell you that when people say a shock like that knocks you sober all at once, they're crazy. I was still more than half-fried and everything was sort of reeling around me, but after a couple of minutes the rain on my head and getting my bleary eyes accustomed to the dark enabled me to see where I was.

I was in a stone-paved courtyard with a building about five stories high forming an L around it, and a tree growing out of the stones at the angle where the end of the L met the next building. There was a door and some windows looking on the court, but they were completely black and silent. Behind me a high wall cut off the view, and I had apparently come through a kind of gate in it.

I thought that if I could go through that gate in one direction, I could in the other, so I opened it. Nothing happened — that is, nothing except that I found myself in a narrow street, not very long, with the shadowy forms of buildings at either end, all of them as black and silent as though this were a deserted city. I was staggering a little and when I put out my hand against the wall it struck some kind of sign, so I snapped my lighter to have a look at it. In letters about four inches high it said IMPASSE DU PETIT JÉSUS, and I want to tell you that stopped me cold.

As I said, I wasn't in very good shape for figuring things out, but before I had time to figure anything out, a searchlight beam went across the sky, then another and another and the most awful pandemonium broke out all around, all sorts of sirens, not like sirens in this country, but a high-pitched *Eeep-eeep-eeepy*, and some kind of sound truck with dim lights went past on one of the cross streets at the end, eeping like mad. There were more

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searchlight beams against the bottom of the clouds, and off in the distance something that sounded like gunfire, and then a heavier explosion, and there was a vivid flash of light behind the buildings in the distance.

I was getting enough soberer to decide that I didn't like any part of this combination of being soaked and maybe socked, when there was a crash as though the whole sky had fallen in, stones went whizzing past my ears, and most of one of the buildings farther down the Alley of the Little Jesus slid into the street and began to burn. I remember thinking how lucky I was they had used a low-power bomb as I ran toward the place, because a big one would have totally demolished me along with most of the buildings on the street.

Windows were coming open all around and doors too, I suppose, but because I was in the street already, I got to the bombed house first. I heard a woman's voice screaming for help from somewhere near the top of the pile of rubble, and, what with the alcohol in me and the excitement, I never thought of doing anything but starting to climb toward the voice. Just as I got near the top, there was another boom which must have been gas catching somewhere, because bright blue flames began to come up, one of them catching me painfully on the hand.

Just beyond was the woman, her head sticking out, and even though she was disheveled and screaming I could see by the light of the fires that she was one of the loveliest objects I have ever put my eyes on. I wrenched at the stones and pieces of wood to get her clear. She stopped screaming and said: "Hurry, Monsieur, for the love of God. I am not hurt, but imprisoned."

I don't know how long I was at it. All I know is that I wasn't paying attention to anything but trying to get her out, and the fire seemed to be gaining on both of us in spite of the rain. Just as I got a big piece of board and pried loose the bent bedstead that was holding her down, a couple of guys in those funny brass helmets French firemen wear were there beside me, hauling us both out and down a short ladder they had run up the side of the rubble-heap. Quite a little crowd had collected at the bottom and they cheered me, the only time such a thing has happened since I hit a home run in a tie-score game while I was playing third base for my high-school team.

They got a coat around the girl, who had been in a nightgown. She said: "I am called Antoinette Violanta. At present, as you see, I have no home, but if Monsieur will tell me his name and where he is staying, I can notify him of where to come to receive my thanks."

"My name's Allen," I told her, "but . . . well . . . I don't exactly know . . ."

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"Ah, Monsieur is an American?" she said. "You speak French very purely, very correctly."

"Thank you," I said, seeing that she apparently really wanted to make something of it, and being not in the least unwilling. "Is it possible, Mlle. Violanta, that I could accompany you —"

Everybody except the firemen who were working on the burning house had been crowding round. Now one of those damned French policemen touched me on the arm. I suppose he must have noticed my hesitation about giving an address.

"Monsieur is very brave, very strong. May I see Monsieur's card of identity? *C'est la guerre.*"

I pulled out my wallet and handed him my old C.I.C. card from the war, which I've found is always good identification because it puts you on the side of the law. He looked at it with a flashlight, and I could see his eyebrows wiggle. He bowed to both of us.

"Will Monsieur and Madame accompany me to the Mairie of the Arrondissement?" he said. "A matter of records, after which quarters will be provided for you, Madame, as a person distressed."

He led the way to the damnedest old jaloppy of a car I ever saw, but I wasn't paying much attention to it, because I was too busy talking to Antoinette Violanta. It seemed she was a dramatic student and lived in what they called a *pension*, which is a kind of boarding house. The Mairie was a big brown building, with blackout curtains at the windows, where they took us into an official room and a clerk took down our names. The cop who had brought us whispered something to him; he asked to see my identity card again, then took it with him and went out. I sat down and talked to Antoinette Violanta some more.

After a long wait he came back and bowed to her. "Mlle. Violanta," he said, "it has been arranged to provide you with a room in the Mairie itself for this night."

She said good night and let me hold her hand for a minute. It occurred to me that I didn't have any place to go, but I wasn't allowed to bother about that, because almost as soon as she got out of the room the clerk came back, followed by another cop and a big old papa of a Frenchman with a bald head and handlebar moustaches and a black silk robe. He sat down behind a desk, picked up the identity card and looked at me with contempt in his eyes.

"M. Allen," he said, "you swear that the information in this document is correct?"

"Certainly," I told him. "It's official. The photograph matches, doesn't it?"

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"M. Allen, you are extraordinarily well-developed for a man of such tender years."

"I don't know about the years being tender," I said. "I'm thirty-four; born in 1915."

"Evidently. And you are a sergeant in the Counter-Intelligence Corps of the American army, the 63rd Division?"

"Yes."

"M. Allen, you will oblige me by telling me where the 63rd Division is engaged."

"Why, we went in to cut off the Colmar pocket first," I said, "and then up into the Saar, with the Seventh Army."

The cops looked at me as though I had said something dirty, and the old guy banged his fist on the desk. "Assassin! Perjurer! Spy!" he shouted. "Confess! You are in the pay of the Boches!"

"I'll confess nothing of the sort —" I began, but he cut me off: "Double liar! We have confirmed the facts telephonically. In the army of our gallant allies, the Americans, there is no 63rd Division and no Counter-Intelligence Corps. A mistake? You Boches always make them, to the little adding those of a true grandeur, in the effort to distract — such as setting your birthdate at an hour which would render you three years old."

He waved dramatically at the calendar on the wall, and all at once I understood why the car we came in looked like such an antique and all the clothes of the people seemed a little funny. The top sheet was for July, 1918.

I hadn't a word to say. The magistrate shook his finger at me. "Evidently the building in the Impasse du Petit Jésus was blown up by you, assassin, instead of by a bomb from one of your airplanes. The ruins will be searched to discover the reason. Place him in a cell until this is done. And you, spy, remember that all is lost."

He stood up. The two cops patted me all over to see if I had any weapons, then hustled me pretty roughly down some stairs into a basement, and threw me into a cell where they locked me in. One of them called out: "Sweet dreams, species of a camel. I'll tell your sweetheart to meet you at the Luxembourg in the morning."

I groped around in the dark until I found a cot, and sat down on it to figure things out. I was fairly sober by this time, and I had the king of all hangovers, the kind you get from sobering up without having had a chance to sleep it off. I decided that if I was not dreaming, Hamid's amulet had been trying to do me a favor by introducing me to Antoinette Violanta, which was a very fine idea; but it had missed fire somehow, and landed me in the pokey as a by-product of the operation. With an espionage rap to beat, too. I know too much about the way the French handle that sort of thing to

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want to take a chance on getting clear, even though when I did, I could find the beautiful Antoinette. And I remembered Hamid had said the amulet would open all locked places. Well, I was behind a lock right then. So I took the amulet and applied it to the lock on the cell door. It opened as though it had never been locked, and I stepped through into the hall in front of my own apartment. It was nearly dawn, and all I had to show for my trip was a burn on my hand and some thoroughly wet and pretty much torn clothes.

Allen finished his Rob Roy and tapped his glass to show that he wanted another.

"Very interesting," said Gillison. "Ver — y interesting. And did you try it again? Or try to check up?"

"As a matter of fact," said Allen, "I did try writing to Paris, but you know how French officials are. They just didn't answer when I asked about somebody named Antoinette Violanta, and I haven't had the chance to go over and check in person. It wouldn't be much use now; she'd be something over fifty. And I haven't tried the amulet again because of something else that happened.

"I was at the house of a girl I know, waiting for her to finish dressing before going out on a date with me one night, when I picked up a silver cigarette box to have a smoke. The lid stuck. I was looking at a magazine at the time, and, without watching what I was doing, I got out my bunch of keys and stuck the thin edge of the amulet into the crack where the lid met the box, and twisted.

"The box came open all right, but when I reached in still with my eyes on the magazine, I got a burn instead of a cigarette. I said, 'Ow!' and looked then. And I saw Hell."

"Hell?" chorused two or three of the listeners.

"What did it look like?" asked Witherwax.

"It looked the way you'd expect Hell to look if you were a fundamentalist. It was only a peep-hole view, but the place was full of real, red angry flames, with little figures moving somewhere far down. Only I didn't get a chance to see any details, because I was so startled I dropped the box. It landed on the lid and closed again, and when I picked it up and opened it, it was full of cigarettes, like always."

"So you don't dare try the amulet any more?" said Gillison.

Allen finished his drink. "No, it's not that. It's just that I'd rather like to get some inkling of what to expect. For example, I don't want to equip myself with an elephant gun and turn up at the court of Napoleon or the North Pole. Look." He slid off the bar stool, walked across to the broom closet at

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the back of the room, and producing something from his pocket, dabbed at the lock. The door swung open, and the others standing at the bar had an impression of something bright inside.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Allen. He paused a moment, then called, "Hey! Look at this!"

"Lights in the closet?" Mr. Gross asked perplexedly.

"A double Rob Roy for the gentleman, Mr. Cohan!" said Gillison with admiration, and strode toward the broom closet.

"Wait a minute!" Allen exclaimed. "You can't do it that way." He disappeared into the closet as though he had been jerked from inside, and the door banged to behind him.

"Hey!" said Mr. Cohan. He went around the bar, crossed to the closet and flung it open.

From the little twelve-by-twelve window at the back, a gust of cool air swirled through Gavagan's Bar. The closet was empty.

Report from the Editors

In the October issue we made the experiment of varying our contents to include a short novel, of about 30,000 words: *Jane Brown's Body*, by Cornell Woolrich. We'll frankly confess that this turned out to be the most controversial step we've ever taken. Few stories in F&SF have drawn so much mail, and no story has produced such an even 50/50 split between extreme enthusiasm and extreme dislike, with no moderate opinions expressed. But the reason for this controversy was not the unusual length, but the very nature of Mr. Woolrich, who seems to some (including, still, your editors) a master of terrifying suspense, and to others the crudest sort of cheap pulpster. Even the most ardent protesters, however, did not mind turning over half the issue to a short novel, provided that the other half contained a sufficiently varied diet of short stories and short shorts. So we may try a short novel again some time — and if you know any obscure masterpiece of around 30,000 words that you feel demands reprinting, please let us hear about it. Remember that F&SF has *no* fixed policy, aside from an insistence on freshness of ideas and high quality of treatment; and your suggestions are always welcome and often influential.

THE EDITORS

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The legend of Cinderella first reached the world in its currently accepted and grievously distorted guise in Charles Perrault's HISTOIRES OU CONTES DU TEMPS PASSÉ AVEC DES MORALITÉS (*Paris,* circa *1697*). *In the following 250 years it has regrettably become a vital part of Western culture. The first successful theatrical adaptation was an opera by the Maltese composer Nicolas Isouard, known as Nicolo, in 1810, followed by later operas by Rossini (1816) and Massenet (1899) — of which the Rossini demands restoration to the standard repertory, not only for its musical brilliance but because the librettist Ferretti revealed a glimmer of the generally suppressed truth. The Cinderella story is an essential stand-by of English Christmas pantomimes; it has served without acknowledgement as the basis of untold films, plays, novels and magazine stories; and most recently it has been recreated by the genius of Walt Disney (in a version in which the superbly evil cat Lucifer and the absurd mice Jaq and Gus-Gus happily steal the show from the human protagonists). But only once, in this quarter millennium, has an author dared to come out boldly and disclose the full truth about Cinderella. In the London Mercury in 1935 Jan Struther, creator of Mrs. Miniver and captivating guest star of* Information, Please!, *made her courageous revelation, which we, as responsible scholars concerned with Truth, are proud to present to you here.*

Ugly Sister

by JAN STRUTHER

MY SISTER and I are old women now. Sophonisba's sight, never good, is failing, and I myself am getting dreadfully deaf; but we both, thank God, have active minds and clear memories, and while this happy state still lasts I feel it is my duty to write down the true history of that distressing episode in our lives about which so many misconceptions have sprung up in the public mind.

If I had only myself to consider, I would not waste ink and paper on clearing the matter up; but I am thinking of Sophonisba. I cannot endure that that gallant, humorous, lovable soul shall go down to history as a ma-

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licious, sour-tempered woman; and if in clearing her character I also make my own a little less misunderstood by posterity, so much the better.

Qui s'excuse s'accuse: but in our case all the accusations are such common property that we can well afford to put forward our defence. Everyone admits that there are two sides to every story, but unfortunately the side that is heard first is the one that sticks in people's heads, especially if it is told by a pretty mouth. Add to this that all the world loves a lover, and that three-quarters of it is very partial to a princess, and you will see how little chance we had of gaining the public sympathy.

We were so happy before mother married again. We lived in a small university town where my father had been a Don. Mother had kept up with all his old friends, who often used to drop in to see us in the evenings. Sophie and I had inherited a good many of father's tastes, and mother, though not intellectual, was a gay and witty talker. We were used, therefore, to "good" conversation and the interchange of stimulating ideas; and though I do not wish to boast, both of us were extremely good at the more amusing and strenuous kind of paper-game.

We were both in the early thirties. Most of the men we met were either contemporaries of my father's, or else young undergraduates with whom we were on terms of pleasant intellectual companionship. I honestly do not think that we ever thought about marriage. I see now that Mother must have realized in our early youth how extremely unlikely we were, with faces like ours, to find husbands, and that she very wisely decided to encourage us in other interests. We were indeed as ugly as we could well be, short of actual deformity. Sophonisba was tall, thin and bony, with sparse, sandy hair, small short-sighted eyes, a sharp nose and a long, ironical upper lip. I, Augusta, was short and fat; my eyebrows were bushy and met in the middle; my nose was snub (snub noses, alas, were not in fashion then); my hair was thick but lustreless, my complexion sallow and my walk ungainly.

Looking back, I have no doubt that people must have felt very sorry for us: but ugliness has its compensations. I do not think that any beautiful woman can ever have a truly deep and wholehearted friendship with a man — or, perhaps, with another woman either; and when an ugly woman grows old, she can face her looking-glass tranquilly, without bitterness, since there is no ghost of her own lost beauty to stand mocking behind her shoulder.

Sophonisba and I hated our mother's remarriage. Our stepfather was a dull pompous city man, handsome in a heavy way, who came to stay from time to time with the Dean. What my mother saw in him I cannot imagine. We were miserable at leaving our beloved little town where we had been known by everyone and liked, I think, by most. In London we knew nobody.

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The people who came to the house were mainly business friends of my stepfather's, who could talk of nothing but food, wines and the stock-market. Any attempt to introduce other subjects would be met with an archly wagged finger and a "Now, Miss Augusta, I can see you two young ladies are regular blue-stockings." And then they would turn an approving eye upon Cinderella, who would respond at once with that swift radiant smile of hers — that smile which we soon perceived to be purely automatic, born of pretty teeth and a vacuous mind.

Not that Cinderella was vain in the ordinary sense; she did not pat or prink before her looking-glass, or spend time and money on new clothes: but her apparent carelessness in these matters was really the outcome of a subtle and deep-rooted arrogance. Nothing could mar her rare beauty, and she knew it. If she appeared with her hair untidy, it only drew people's attention to its exquisite colouring and texture: you could almost hear the words "ripe corn" and "unruly tendrils" forming in their minds. If she wore an old plain ragged frock it showed up all the better the delicate grace of her figure: you could see people thinking "How lovely she looks — even in that!" When she went barefoot, as she often did, she would laugh merrily and put it down to economy ("You see, I take ones in shoes and I always have to have them made for me — such an expense"): but Sophonisba and I, seeing all eyes riveted upon those tiny arched insteps, knew better. Moreover, in an age when both were in vogue she used neither paint nor powder, saying that she was afraid she was old-fashioned enough not to care for them: as who would, in God's name, whose face was wild rose petals strewn on snow? It is the plain woman that fills the dressmaker's pockets and sends the children of the cosmetic manufacturer to school.

For the first time in our lives Sophonisba and I became fully conscious of our own ugliness; and that is not a happy piece of knowledge. But even so we did not grudge Cinderella her beauty, since it was compensated for by an almost complete absence of brains. She was, as I believe the modern usage has it, dead from the neck up. She never opened a book, except for an occasional romantic novel, or passed a remark, except to comment on the weather or to retail a piece of domestic gossip. Worst of all, she was quite hopeless at even the simplest paper-games. If asked for an animal beginning with B she wrote down "Bird"; and when patiently reminded that an adverb was, roughly speaking, something that ended in "ly" she said "Oh, yes, I remember — like 'silly' and 'Sally.'" And when we teased her about it (quite gently, for we were fond of her at first), she tossed her head, refused to play any more, and sat for the rest of the evening pouting like a child and very ostentatiously darning her father's socks.

As time went on she affected more and more this domestic rôle; partly, I

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think, to show that she too had her accomplishments, and partly because its attitudes became her. Many a man has lost his heart to the nape of a neck that's bent over sewing in the lamplight, or to the sweeping curve of a pectoral muscle as an arm is raised to dust the cobwebs from a shelf. There was no harm in all this — though for my part I think the world contains a thousand studies more absorbing than housewifery and a thousand places more interesting than a store-cupboard; besides, it upset the servants, who found themselves with too little to do. But what did exasperate us was the way she was always trying to make a martyr of herself and put us in the wrong. If we asked her to come out with us to a play or a concert, she would say "No, you two go, I've got a mass of mending to do — and besides, I don't like to leave Mother and Father *all* alone." (*Mother* and Father, mark you!) If anyone was needed to wind wool, arrange flowers, pack up parcels, or exercise the dog, Cinderella always managed to say angelically, "*I'll* do it — *I* don't mind," before Sophie and I had time to speak — though in nine cases out of ten *we* should not have minded either. And if anybody in the house was ill she fairly leapt at the opportunity for self-sacrifice. "*I'll* sit up with her, Mother; Sophie and Gussie were out so late last night at the opera, they must be dying for bed. I often think I ought to have gone in for nursing — it seems to come natural to me." In the face of such a genius for masochism, Sophie and I could do nothing but stand aside.

When we first knew her we thought it remarkable that she was not already married, but we soon discovered the reason. True, a young man had only to look at her and he lost his heart: but he had only to listen to her conversation and he recovered it. We saw this happen over and over again. The eyes which had been bright with admiration would gradually glaze with boredom; the lips which had been parted in eager wonder would compress themselves upon a stifled yawn; and then the young man would either leave off coming to the house altogether or else strike up a queer lopsided friendship with Sophie and me. They all seemed to regard us as immensely old but rather entertaining. Sometimes they would even discuss Cinderella with us.

"Miss Sophie," they would say, "it's a pity about Cinders, isn't it? I mean, she's perfectly lovely and all that, but — well, what I mean is, she's *dumb*." And Sophie (who was never quite as quick as I am to assimilate the modern idiom) would answer, drily, "That's just what she *isn't*, more's the pity."

The remainder of the story is well, though inaccurately, known. I will not repeat it in detail, but will merely try to refute one or two essential errors. There is no foundation for the popular belief that Cinderella was not invited to the Court Ball: we were all asked, and we all accepted. Cinderella was as excited as any of us at the prospect of going, though she

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flatly refused to buy a new gown for the occasion, saying (with a sweet glance at us) that she didn't want to run her father into any more expense and that her old brown linsey would do quite well. Sophie and I thought that this was carrying self-satisfaction a little too far, but, of course, we couldn't say so. Nor could we conceal from ourselves the fact that neither Sophie's new yellow tarlatan nor my own crimson paduasoy would make us look like anything but a pair of frights with whom nobody would want to dance. Still, we looked forward to going. Sophie always enjoyed watching pageantry, and for my part, I was writing a novel at the time and I regarded everything as copy.

On the very day of the ball my stepfather was seized with a violent attack of gout. This was neither surprising, since he lived far too well, nor unusual, since it happened about every three months. But Cinderella could not let pass such a golden opportunity for martyrdom. She declined point-blank to go to the ball, saying that she must stay at home and look after him. In vain my mother protested that if anybody stayed it should be herself, as she was his wife; in vain Sophie and I vowed that it would spoil our enjoyment to think of her moping at home; in vain my stepfather raged and stormed, and pointed out that he had had many worse attacks of gout before and that in any case her presence would do nothing to alleviate it. She merely looked at him with eyes like a wounded deer, took up a basket of mending and settled herself down obstinately in the chimney corner. It was no good arguing. My father stumped upstairs to bed and the rest of us went off to the ball, our spirits somewhat dashed by the contretemps.

For my account of what followed I am indebted to Cinderella's godmother, with whom Sophie and I afterwards became very friendly: a sensible witty woman, though undoubtedly a little fey. It appears that she happened to look in unexpectedly that evening, and found Cinderella sitting by the fire, shedding upon her work-basket those easy and becoming tears of self-pity which never made an eye red yet. It took her godmother about two minutes to size up the situation and about five to get it well in hand.

"Off you go to the ball!" she said. "You'd do your poor father better service by trying to find yourself a husband than by staying at home to make him hot possets, which one of the servants could do just as well, if not better."

Cinderella then complained that she had no coach to go in; whereupon her godmother sent the scullery-maid round to the nearest tavern, which was also a livery-stable, to hire the best vehicle which they could provide. The absurd rumours of black magic which still persist in connection with Cinderella's coach can be traced to the fact that this tavern rejoiced in the somewhat unusual name of the "Mouse and Pumpkin."

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While they waited for the horses to be put to, her godmother tackled Cinderella on the subject of clothes.

"You can't go in *that* old rag," she said crisply.

"It's all I've got," said Cinderella, with (I've no doubt) a slight quiver of that unfailingly rosy lip; and then came out with her usual line about not wanting to put her father to expense. This met with a merciless snub.

"Stuff and nonsense, child! Your father would sooner stump up the price of a new gown to catch a husband than go on paying your board and lodging for life." So Cinderella had to fall back on her real reason. "I look very nice in this," she said, sulkily. "No doubt," snapped her godmother, who, though fey, had a healthy respect for royalty; "but you'll look more like a lady in *this*."

With that she whisked off her own flowered silk — she had never lost her trim youthful figure and took a pride in dressing to it — and made Cinderella put it on. I cannot deny that it suited her to perfection. Finally came the question of shoes — and here, of course, even the godmother was powerless to provide anything small enough; so she ordered Cinderella to wear the newest pair she had, which happened to be some high-heeled bedroom slippers trimmed with fur. The confusion between *vair* [fur] and *verre* [glass] in the French version of the story has already been pointed out by many learned commentators.

"And look here, child," said her godmother as Cinderella stepped into the coach, "there's one thing you *must* remember if this ball of yours is to result in a proposal: *Come home on the stroke of twelve, before supper is announced.* Your beauty's undeniable and your dancing, I know, accomplished, but no young man, however much attracted, could still want to marry you after listening to your conversation for a solid half-hour. Mark my words — if you stay to supper, you're lost. And" (she added tartly) "I shall take steps to see that you don't." With that she vanished, and Cinderella, chastened in spirit but resplendent in appearance, galloped off to the ball.

The rest is plain sailing. I have nothing to add to the incidents which have been so often described — the Prince's infatuation with Cinderella, her forgetfulness of the time, the extraordinary change which appeared to come over her dress at midnight (a mesmeric trick of her godmother's, no doubt), the flight from the palace, the dropped slipper, the royal proclamation, and so forth. The Prince was so transported when he eventually discovered her that he married her by special licence that very day; and if he subsequently found her conversation tedious and her personality exasperating, it was by then too late to mend. In those days marriages *were* marriages, especially royal ones.

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There is the true story. My stepfather died soon afterwards of cirrhosis of the liver; my mother, Sophie and I lost no time in returning to our beloved university town, where we soon slipped back into the congenial circle of friends which we had left. And ever since my mother's death, Sophonisba and I have lived on here together, active members of the Literary Society and, I think I may say, the friends and confidantes of an endless succession of undergraduates. I suppose by now we are what you would call "characters." There are worse fates.

We never see Cinderella, except when she comes down (shrunken, white-haired and leaning on a stick) to open a bazaar or lay a foundation stone. They say that death is a great leveller: but I sometimes think that he has little of it left to do when age has got there before him.

The Hunting of the Slan

I have sometimes amused myself by endeavoring to fancy what would be the fate of any individual gifted, or rather accursed, with an intellect *very* far superior to that of his race. Of course, he would be conscious of his superiority; nor could he (if otherwise constituted as man is) help manifesting his consciousness. Thus he would make himself enemies at all points. And since his opinions and speculations would widely differ from those of *all* mankind — that he would be considered a madman, is evident. How horribly painful such a condition! Hell could invent no greater torture than that of being charged with abnormal weakness on account of being abnormally strong.

In like manner, nothing can be clearer than that a *very* generous spirit — *truly* feeling what all merely profess — must inevitably find itself misconceived in every direction — its motives misinterpreted. Just as extremeness of intelligence would be thought fatuity, so excess of chivalry could not fail of being looked upon as meanness in its last degree — and so on with other virtues. This subject is a painful one indeed. That individuals *have* so soared above the plane of their race is scarcely to be questioned; but, in looking back through history for traces of their existence, we should pass over all biographies of "the good and the great," while we search carefully the slight records of wretches who died in prison, in Bedlam, or upon the gallows.

Edgar Allan Poe: Marginalia
("Southern Literary Messenger," June, 1849)

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Man, in his arrogance, believes that he rules the world; but it is only the balance of nature among the other animals that enables him to maintain his ruling position. Let one spring pass without the feeding of fledgling birds; and the insects will dominate and destroy man's agriculture. Let man introduce anywhere (as he did in Australia with the rabbit) an animal without its natural enemy; and he must devote all his energy for generations to repairing his error. L. Major Reynolds, well known Los Angeles science fiction fan and occasional professional writer, has given us a terrifying glimpse of a moment when man's security was all but destroyed by the intrusion of a new factor, when man was strangely saved without ever knowing that he had been in peril.

Flood

by L. MAJOR REYNOLDS

THE RAGING FLOOD tore at the side of the rain-sodden mountain just below the city. Imperceptibly the surface of the tortured slope quivered, slid for a few inches, and subsided. The high cliff on the opposite bank stood rock solid ignoring the tumult below.

The driving spring storm drove its waters into the widening crevice formed by many centuries of freezing winters, opening it still more. The last of the ice disappeared, and the warmer waters rushed to fill the opening. The weight was too much. With a groan almost human, the mountain side slid with a rush, damming the river from bank to bank.

The torrent flung itself against the barricade and rose swiftly, forming a lake that backed rapidly toward the unsuspecting city.

A watery moon peered from a break in the clouds and shone down on the scene.

The streaming sewer outlets were soon covered, and the water crept higher and higher along the great pipes.

Below the streets the sound of scrabbling claws increased as the rats raced to escape the certain death that rushed upon them.

The pressure in the deepest sewer became unbearable. At several points the concrete cracked. In one place an entire section broke away and crumbled into fragments. The water reached eager fingers into the opening and tore great slabs of earth free, mingling it with the racing flood. Deeper and deeper

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the openings grew as more and more of the pipe gave way to the water.

A long fault opened, and the water raced down the steep slope to collect in a deep cavern far below the surface.

It was quiet for a breath, then a tremendous upheaval came and the water foamed and boiled. Something fought a battle with the roaring flood, and the cavern became a maelstrom. The upsurge tore the fault open to the top, and something rushed from the dark space in an attempt at escape.

Above ground, and bracing the rain, a nondescript cat left the dubious shelter of a packing case and slunk through an alley to the street. Some inner sense took him to the nearest sewer entrance, and he crouched above it, waiting for something he dimly sensed. A pair of eyes blazed in the half-light and a mangy tom slid from the shadows to help with the vigil. Across the street more padding forms appeared. There was no thought of battle. Each accepted the other, and all feuds were forgotten in the instinctive call that had brought them there. The rain poured down on the waiting animals.

Suddenly the line tensed. There was a scratching sound at the curb, and the nose and whiskers of a giant rat slid cautiously into view. The cats waited with the inborn patience of the hunter until the prey pulled himself into the street.

There was no audible sound, but only two of the cats made the leap that brought them, one on each side of their victim.

A quick rip of sharp teeth and the instant sheen of claws left the rat dead on the pavement, and the cats returned to their vigil.

Time after time the scene was repeated. As the water flooded higher, the rats became more frantic in their efforts to escape. Often, when the struggle ended, it was a cat who lay quietly in the street while the rat tried desperately to find an opening in the circle of enemies which surrounded him. But there was always another foe to face no matter where he turned.

There was excitement in the city now. The sound of sirens, and the roar of trucks as the aroused populace rushed to the river.

Giant searchlights split the sky and focused on the landslide. Wires hummed with hurried messages for help.

And still the water rose, eating away the dam with tiny ineffectual nibbles that could never keep pace with the volume pouring down from the distant mountains, building up the force of the water, till the pressure was almost unbearable.

Something in the sewers was going mad.

Something that hated the touch of water. Something that wanted again the dry solitude of its deep cavern. The water beat at it, and it beat back in insane flailings which smashed sections of pipe as if they were made of paper.

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The weight of water continued to increase, and a wide crack opened to the street.

Something screamed soundlessly as the watery moonlight shone into the crevice.

Across the river, a truck loaded with dynamite started toward the scene along the river road. A wall of water hit a bridge and swept it away to add its debris to the barricade. One flailing girder reached out, struck the truck, and the night bloomed with the flash of the explosion.

Smaller slides started along the mountain and the waves slapped against the opposite bank and overran the streets.

Two battles were raging now. Man against the elements, and the cats against their hereditary foes.

The rats were pouring from the sewer in a steady stream, and the cats, reinforced by the arrival of several dogs, fought grimly. There was a tangled mass in the street now, but it was uncannily quiet except for an occasional squeal of rage and frustration from a cornered victim.

The rain-washed pavement shone oddly red in the dim light.

Far down the street a roof blossomed in scarlet flame, and a fire engine howled past the unheeding animals. No man-made noise could stop them. They were grim on the business of extermination.

Under the streets in the sewers, things that had long lived beyond the sight of man moved upward as the surge completely filled the pipes.

The rain was slackening over the city, but dark masses of cloud hung blackly over the distant mountains. And still the water rose higher.

At the landslide, great steam shovels dug frantically at the mass of earth and rock that was spelling the doom of the city. Drills and jackhammers pounded at the base of the cliff, only to be stopped by a harried engineer and sent to the top to start from there.

The tempo of the drills stepped up even faster; and as more lights were added, the scene became almost as bright as day. Frantic scurrying figures seemed to chase each other up and down the cliff face, laying the ropes to hold the hard-rock men in their race against time.

And the water rose, merciless and deadly.

In the city, where there was no eye to see, strange things happened along the main sewer route. Great cracks appeared in the pavements, and car tracks twisted as if endowed with some inner life. Manhole covers shot into the air as if propelled by mighty guns. Geysers of solid water held them up like tangible pillars for the moment, then blew them airily aside to fall with a destructive crash.

And in the sewers the black something keened in suffering as it forced itself higher and higher seeking the dry security left behind.

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On the outskirts of the city a number of shadowy forms padded along the soaked ground. They hesitated when they reached the pavement, but some inner force urged them on. Pointed ears cocked forward, they slunk toward the compelling scent that had reached for miles.

The rats were frantic. The sewer opening was a squirming mass that churned within itself. Outside, the cats and dogs waiting in a grim circle for any brave enough to show himself. Inside, a menace they knew was there, but could not comprehend.

There was a movement on the outer edge of the ring, and room was made for the newcomers. The wildcats moved in silently and waited.

Down the street the water rose, keeping pace with the sewers. A long lithe water snake came from the opening and the line parted to allow it to pass. Enemy of the rats, as the waiting warriors seemed to sense, the sinuous form cleared the circle, coiled itself for action, and waited.

The mass of rats gibbered and squealed, trying in vain to communicate to their antagonists the presence behind them of a greater unknown foe, an enemy of *all* life.

For a moment it was stalemate. The steep slope of the street held the rushing waters back long enough for the rats to mass for the final charge.

An earth-shaking blast announced the first explosion, but not an eye moved from the milling rats.

Down at the river, men battled madly to open a way for the waters. Half the cliff was gone now, but the barricade was still too high for the rising water to surmount.

From the distant mountains came flashes of lightning, and the deep rumble of thunder tried to copy the man-made blast of explosives.

All roads were part of the river now, and the beleaguered ones looked toward the west in a vain search for help. But in that direction lay only the vast expanse of ocean.

Five hundred miles away there was sudden activity around a group of planes. Shiny fat-bellied bombs were being loaded, and each of the flying monsters vibrated with eagerness to be gone. A reassuring message was sent, but the last wires were swept away before the news was received.

One by one the ships roared into the air, and help was on its way.

The cats were becoming bolder now. Several of them had made a lightning-fast dash and pulled some of the rats from their hold. That seemed to break the spell that had held them in the sewer entrance.

The battle was no longer quiet. It was a roaring mêlée of cats, dogs, rats and wildcats. And on the outskirts of the throng, the sleek water snake patrolled, alert for any rodent that escaped the maddened crowd.

And still the water rose. Down the street, and creeping closer, came the

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steady march, keeping pace with the sewers. The entire end of the city was one with the mighty lake the river had become.

The river had a new sound now. It was a low growl, as if it realized with some uncanny instinct that this time it had the ruling hand. Man had tamed its waters and made it do his bidding for too long. But now the age-old scale had shifted.

Time paced by as the flood occupied the city.

The rain started again, and the waters draining from the upper street were dappled with red.

It was uncannily quiet now. The rain lasted for only a few moments; then the sky cleared as if by magic. There was the first hint of the false dawn in the east, and hopeful eyes waited the coming of the day. But still the raging flood raced down from the mountains to drive the level still higher.

The battle was to the death now. Giant rats, who had lived in darkness for years, were coming out of the sewer. Four of them swung from the throat of a dog, slicing away the flesh till they reached the jugular. But even as victory was attained, other defenders fell on them and life was a fleeting thing.

There was a moment's pause as the final victims searched frantically for one last foothold inside the sewer. The first glint of water slopped over the edge into the street, and suddenly every rat made a wild scramble for the dubious safety of the open air. But they came in sorry shape. Some of them were oddly crushed and bleeding.

The defenders moved forward as one, only to stop dead in their tracks. The soundless screaming came again, was perceptible to all now, and each animal reacted in its own way.

The hackles of the dogs lifted, and they crouched, belly down on the wet pavement, lips snarled back over white fangs.

Cats, in midstride with one lifted foot, arched their backs and low rumblings came from their throats.

And the rats turned and faced the opening, waiting in the same menacing line with their recent enemies.

Something alien was just within the entrance of the sewer. Something older than life itself. Side by side, the animals waited, hearing subconsciously the soundless scream.

The light was strengthening as the sunrise grew brighter.

Suddenly the quiet was broken as the sound of roaring motors cut across the sky, and the great bombers came into view, heading for the river.

A black mass filled the sewer entrance and crawled out on the pavement. Every animal faced it tensely.

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At the landslide, the populace cheered at the sight of the planes, and scattered to points of safety. The ships made a trial run over the site, and swung to come in on the line.

One of the fat-bellied bombs came free from the leading craft and spun downward.

The black mass was out of the sewer, ringed by a circle of fangs. Great gobbets were torn from it, as the frenzied animals fought with the courage of desperation. Higher and higher the unheard scream became, until even the pilots of the planes shifted uneasily in their seats and shook their heads, trying to force it from their minds. The townspeople seemed frozen as the keening went on.

The first bomb hit squarely on top of the slide, and half of it vanished in an upsurge of rocks and rubble. The next plane made its run, and again the perfectly aimed blast shook the earth.

As the third craft set itself, the first rays of the sun shone down upon the streets of the city. They struck the opening of the sewer where the battle was being fought. The mass of blackness suddenly exploded in a cloud of greasy smoke. Where it had been was nothing.

There was a final blast, and a wild cheer as the landslide was blown away. The river raced once more through its bed, and the flooding waters lowered rapidly.

The rats that were left turned slowly, and threading their way through the crowd of erstwhile enemies, went once again into the darkness of the sewer.

And not a claw was raised to stop them.

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R. Bretnor's The Gnurrs Come From the Voodvork Out *(recently reprinted in the Bleiler-Dikty* BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES — 1951*) was as uproariously rowdy a satire as F&SF has printed, cheerfully pointing out the absurdity of war, science, invention, the cavalry, pigsticking and other facets of modern culture. What few subjects were omitted from* The Gnurrs *now come in for Bretnorian attention in* Mrs. Poppledore's Id, *which deals,* inter alia, *with poltergeister, the publishing business, exorcists, archimandrites and (inter alienists), Freudians, parapyschologists and the commercial purveyors of Peace of Mind, Soul, and Whathaveyou. Especially noteworthy is Bretnor's handling of a variety of facets of religious and quasi-religious thought. Science fiction has too often been crudely and sophomorically anti-religious. That it can be the vehicle of deeply sincere religious expression is demonstrated elsewhere in this issue by Edward Everett Hale and Mildred Clingerman. Bretnor has chosen a third approach: a satiric depiction of the religious insecurity of our contemporary civilization, and a biting (and exceedingly funny) portrayal of the shallow opportunists who feed on the shell of religiosity without ever penetrating to the kernel of religion. Bretnor has a fine lively sense of the absurd that can make a weary editor chortle aloud while reading a story, for the nth time, in galley proofs; and he's rarely chosen material more precisely suited to his talents.*

Mrs. Poppledore's Id

by R. BRETNOR

"NAMES," said Constance Poppledore. "People's names." Her large brown eyes regarded Dr. Vole. She asked herself why ugly, hairy little men so often were attracted to psychiatry. She sighed. "I think about them all the time," she said. "People's names, I mean. They're always like their hats. Why do you suppose Mildred Bunny's hats make her look as if she had long, floppy ears? Ugh!" She shivered. "Each time I see her, I think of nothing else for hours and hours."

Dr. Manfred Vole smoothed the fur on the back of his left hand, and made a soft professional noise. The garment which enveloped Mrs. Poppledore's rotundities was, like the *chaise longue* which supported them, chastely

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Hellenic. Hellenic, too, was the pear-shaped cluster of red grapes held in an antique attitude above her small red mouth. The balance of the Poppledore apartment was spare and angular with chrome and desiccated wood and zebra skin. The over-all effect, thought Dr. Vole, was as though Isadora Duncan had been swallowed, young and whole, by some unpromising designer of svelte powder rooms.

"Now, Mrs. Poppledore," he suggested gently, "weren't we beginning to discuss the Id?"

Constance Poppledore ate a grape. "That's what's so sad about it," she informed him. "Poor Canon Bunny. She doesn't understand him, and people are always laughing at his name. But *I* think it's really rather nice. *V. Bede Bunny.* The Reverend Canon V. Bede Bunny. It has a Trollopey, Old English sort of sound. And it's only because his mother was a Venable, and his father was so clever and devout. And you can't name a little boy *Venerable*, now can you?"

Politely, Dr. Vole agreed that you could not. Mr. Julian Poppledore had urged upon him the problem of V. Bede Bunny's growing influence; and now, opening his notebook, he hastily scribbled *FF?* to remind himself that a father fixation might be worth looking into.

"Freud's concept of the Id," he stated with determination, "is something every really intelligent person should understand." He paused to let the flattery take effect; and Mrs. Poppledore reached out to him at once.

"Do have a grape," she said.

"No, thank you. Now, the Id —"

"That's what I mean! The things I feel about deep down inside. That's why I mentioned Canon Bunny, don't you see? It's so unfair! Especially with all those bishops so against him, and just when we're publishing his book. Why, if it hadn't been for that old Charles Laughton king with all the wives, *you* know, the whole thing might be different. Because *Peace Of Heart* is ever so much better than those other books. It's full of quotations from the Fathers, and from John Donne and Tristram Shandy and all sorts of people."

Dr. Vole experienced an emotion, instantly diagnosed it as acute annoyance, and applied a simple therapy, reminding himself that within six months his bill to Mr. Poppledore would more than meet the purchase price of a new Cadillac convertible, a yellow one. He saw himself driving up to the nurses' quarters at the Defective Children's Home and —

He shook himself. As the convertible dissolved, he remarked that Canon Bunny seemed to have a keen eye for a trend. "Freud was the same way," he said. "The concept of the Id —"

"Oh, was he? You must tell Canon Bunny all about it. He'll be so interested. But really, isn't it unfair? *They* have them all the time. I mean, they

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had one just a week ago. And in the *Bronx!*" She pouted. "It's quite absurd!"

"*They?*" asked Dr. Vole. "I don't seem to recall —"

"Of course you do! A week ago. It happened to some little Polish child. The picture wept real tears when she said her prayers, even on television. Naturally, the Cardinal wouldn't say whether it was or wasn't, but then they never do."

It came to Dr. Vole that she was speaking of the Roman Church — and that miracles, through some grave error of the Reformation, were denied to Canon Bunny.

"I think about it all the time!" said Constance Poppledore. "Why couldn't Mildred be cured of her neuralgia, even though she does wear those hats? Or maybe some old leper? That would be better yet. *That* might mean half a million extra copies — and think of all the *good* they'd do! Besides, it would be nice for Rummage House, and dear Henry Rummage, and of course Julian. Publishing is such a dreadful gamble nowadays." She took a final grape, lowered her head, allowed her eyes to close. "But I suppose there's nothing we can do," she said resignedly. "Now you can tell me all about the Id."

Dr. Vole's bemused mental mechanism whirred into action. A gleam came to his eye. "Yes, Mrs. Poppledore. Yes, indeed. The Id —"

He broke off sharply — the door had opened. He turned his head.

"I'm sorry," said Constance Poppledore's maid, "but Canon Bunny's here."

V. Bede Bunny was portly but very pale. He hesitated at the door, one finger touching diffidently his pectoral cross. "I am so sorry, Mrs. Poppledore!" He glanced apology at Dr. Vole. "Surely I intrude?"

"Why, Canon Bunny!" Constance Poppledore swept up to greet him. "You? Intrude?" Laughing, she took his arm. "This is a dear new friend of mine and Julian's, Dr. Manfred Vole. He's my psychiatrist."

Dr. Vole rose reluctantly and shook a big white hand.

"Doctor, it's very good of you, allowing me to interrupt like this. I won't be long." As Constance Poppledore resumed her couch, he sat down comfortably. "A painful situation has come up," he told her. "A most important convert from Bombay is here, and I must entertain him tomorrow. The invitations have gone out; it's all prepared. And now poor Mildred —"

Mrs. Poppledore gave him a long and understanding look.

" — feels her neuralgia coming on again. So *she* suggested that you might be my hostess in her stead."

"How sweet of her! I'd love to, naturally. That is, if Dr. Vole thinks it won't hurt my Id."

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"Your — *Id*?"

"He says my Id needs mending — that something horrible happened to it when I was small, in a dramatic episode."

"*Trau*matic," objected Dr. Vole.

She dismissed the technicality. "He says that if I think and think maybe I can remember just what happened, and then my Id will be all together again."

"That isn't quite correct —"

"Like Humpty-Dumpty," she persisted. "And the only thing I can remember is how I had the poltergeist when I was thirteen, and it threw stones and the furniture, and I was *so* annoyed."

"You should have told me!" Dr. Vole was irritated.

"John Wesley," put in Canon Bunny, uneasily, "wrote of his troubles with a poltergeist. I mention it in *Peace Of Heart*, as an example of how the wayward intellect can lead the soul astray."

"Well," said Constance Poppledore, "I'm sure his wasn't half as good as mine. And I wasn't led astray either, because mine started in right after Papa had been so mean to me —"

"Ah-h!" murmured Dr. Vole.

"— and afterwards he treated me ever so much better — Papa, I mean. He even let me ride with him Saturdays when he drove into Sioux Falls."

"I'm sure there was no parallel." The Canon flushed. "On the one hand, we have a misfit, a dissenter; on the other, the pretty innocence of a pink-cheeked country girl." He rose and made a bow at Mrs. Poppledore. "Dear me, it's *very* late, and I must run along. At four tomorrow, then? Good, good. Doctor, I trust we'll meet again, and — ha-ha! — discuss the *cure of souls* at greater length. No, don't get up. I'll find my way very nicely, thank you. Goodbye, goodbye."

The door closed behind him — and Dr. Vole turned to his patient testily. "It is significant," he told her, "that your hatred for your father produced hallucinations in your adolescence."

"I didn't *hate* him. It's only that he was horrid all the time, and mean to me. And it wasn't an hallucination!"

Dr. Vole thought of the Cadillac, and regained a measure of his self-possession. "How was he mean to you?"

"That's what I can't remember."

"Oh, but you must." His voice assumed a note of calm authority. "We must retrieve these dark experiences in order to deprive them of their power. Now we will try. Lie back — that's better. And close your eyes. Imagine that you're a little girl again, on the farm. There's your nasty father, just as he was. It's that same day. Now, think back —"

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"I *am*. Only —"

"Try, *try*. He's getting ready to be mean to you! But don't get scared. He can't really hurt you anymore. He can't because —"

A sudden inspiration came to Dr. Vole.

"— *because Canon Bunny's right there by your side*. Now! What is your father doing?"

"Why, I *remember*," cried Constance Poppledore. "He's —"

And just then, without any warning whatsoever, Dr. Manfred Vole was lifted, chair and all, and hurled violently through the air to land with a crash on a zebra-skin rug some yards away.

"Did something fall?" she asked. "How strange! And I feel so much better! Do you suppose my Id is all right now?"

There was a silence. After a moment, dreamily, she said, "I'm sure that we could find a leper somewhere, couldn't we, if we tried hard?"

Dr. Vole could never quite recall his farewell to Mrs. Poppledore. Something had pelted him with two cubistic ashtrays, an old copy of *Flair*, and a table-lamp that looked like a toadstool with the bends; yet even this assault left only a blurred impression on his memory.

Blind instinct turned him to the nearest bar. He entered, staggered to a stool, and tried to think of something alcoholic. Finally —

"A — a double Muscatel," he squeaked.

Administering this dose, he ordered another. When that was gone, he said, "Now I shall have some whisky," decisively.

"Scotch —" The bartender winced. "— or rye?"

"Both!" said Dr. Vole.

Presently he looked up from the contemplation of his empty glass, and, handling each word with great delicacy, said, "*There are . . . more things . . . under heaven and earth . . . Ho-Horatio . . . than are . . . than are . . .* I can't seem to remember the next line. *For — For you shall stand . . . at my right hand . . . and keep the bridge with me?*"

"That's right!" affirmed the bartender. "Horatio On The Bridge. It's about a Limey admiral."

"Thank you," said Dr. Vole. He descended, walked very carefully to the telephone, and called Mr. Poppledore's number at Rummage House.

"This is Dr. Vole. V-O-L-E. I want to talk —"

"*I* want to talk to *you!*" shouted the telephone. "What's all this nonsense you've been giving Connie? About lepers. Yes, dammit, *lepers!* She just got through calling me. Wants *me* to find a leper! You think we can afford to let the Press catch on this whacky Bunny character is trying to heal lepers? His bishop's already trying to unfrock him!"

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Dr. Vole held the instrument at a safe distance. "That's not important! The polter —"

"NOT IMPORTANT? How much do you suppose we've sunk in *Peace Of Heart?* Now you get busy, Vole, and get her psycho'ed out of this, you hear me? What do you think I'm paying you for?"

There was an angry click, and Dr. Vole abruptly saw that Mr. Poppledore had no intention of holding the bridge with him.

He rang up Canon Bunny — who listened politely until he was informed that the poltergeist transferred the case of Constance Poppledore from the doctor's own mundane province to his more ghostly one.

"*My* province?" he exclaimed. "Oh, dear me, no! I feel that there must be some perfectly natural explanation — Exorcism? Doctor, this isn't the Sixteenth Century! Really, you sound a little overwrought. Can you have just imagined —? No? Well, take my advice; discuss it with some good psychia — Why, so you are! Of *course!* . . . The strain of modern life; it tells on all of us! There's a whole chapter on it in *Peace Of Heart.* I'll have a copy sent to you, inscribed. Goodness, now there's the bell! I do hope you'll feel better. Goodbye."

Dr. Vole peered sadly at the telephone. He saw that it was fuzzing at the edges and trying to waver off into a new dimension — as though it had no further reason for existence now that the connection with the Canon had been broken.

This circumstance disturbed and angered him. "I'll show you!" he exploded, grabbing the dial with both hands. "There *are* more things in — h-heaven and earth — H-Horazhio —"

Immediately, a flash of inspiration gave him the inner meaning of the words. How clearly they referred to the multiplicity of clergymen — here, there, everywhere — most of them probably eager to stand at his right hand!

He leaned against the wall. "Pes-bry-terians," he murmured happily, "Luther-ans, B-B-Baptists, Southern-fried Methodists, all sorts of other Prot — Ah-*ha!*"

Before his eyes swam the remembered countenance of Winton Furnwillie, Doctor of Divinity, consulting editor for Rummage House, author of *Satan: A Case History*, and pastor of a decorously prosperous North Side congregation.

"I'll take a cab!" declared Dr. Vole. He made a futile effort to retrieve his dime; then left the booth and tacked around the bar. "A Bunnyphone — tha's what you've got!" he called. "Long floppy ears. I saw 'em."

"Uh-huh —" The bartender was unperturbed. "— it's Easter. Bye-bye, Horatio."

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Some moments later, Dr. Vole rode away wrapped in a rosy dream — of Mrs. Poppledore rising, purged and pure of Id, from the remains of her vanquished poltergeist, which lay, much like a wilted lettuce, at his feet.

Seated at his desk, penning the rough draft of some future sermon, the Reverend Winton Furnwillie looked like a carefully expurgated version of Bertrand Russell. When Dr. Vole appeared, he showed almost no surprise. He appraised him for the space of half a second. Then, with a quiet sigh, he motioned to his panting secretary to release the doctor's sleeve.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

The chemical reactions in Dr. Vole had progressed somewhat. He bowed, lost his balance, caught at the edge of the desk, and lowered himself delicately to the floor. "F-Furnwillie," he giggled. "The Reveren' Doctor Winton F-F-Furnwillie. 'Stoo long. I'll call you Revdoc. Cincpac, Ingsoc, Revdoc — get it?" He composed his features. "The boy — stood — at my burning bridge," he began sonorously.

"Ah?" Dr. Furnwillie lifted a fine white brow.

"Yes," said Dr. Vole, "but doesn' soun' right. Try again." Closing one eye, he held a mock spyglass to it with both hands. " 'Sbetter. Uh — England expec's more things in heaven and earth, H-Horazhio — than every man —"

"The *correct* reading," interrupted Dr. Furnwillie, "is, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' Hamlet, Act I, Scene V."

"Ph'losophy!" remarked Dr. Vole, wide-eyed. "Ol' William Shagespeare!"

Dr. Furnwillie beamed. "Excuse me for a moment." He rose and left the room, and there was a sound of running water. When he returned, he gave a brimming glass to Dr. Vole. "Drink this," he said, "and you'll feel ever so much better."

Dr. Vole did as he was told. He drained the glass. He gasped. His eyes glazed. Dreadful things started happening to his midriff.

"A mild restorative," observed Dr. Furnwillie, seating himself again. "Water and spirits of ammonia. And now —" He lifted his hands in a gesture of commiseration. "— I see that you are troubled?"

"*Gug!*" said Dr. Vole emphatically.

"I understand. And you shall have my sympathy, my spiritual support, my counsel."

"*Gug-splut!*"

"Now, now! You mustn't thank me. And don't explain. The burden of even the most wretched sinner is mine to share. Nor does its nature matter.

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Our troubles and concerns proceed from Satan, whom I have analyzed quite thoroughly. We shall be practical. I will explain to you how Satan works, how best to thwart him. You will go forth thrice-armed. Satan, you see —"

Dr. Vole clutched the top of his head, which suddenly was threatening to come off. He wanted desperately to tell of his dilemma. His mind formed sentences. He forced words to his lips —

They came out as, "*Ooh-blug!*"

"Satan —" Dr. Furnwillie's tone became rather firmer than before. "— frightens too many people. It's been the propaganda — Faust and that sort of thing. It lends him stature. It hides his basic motives. Believe me, Dr. Vole, Satan is a social climber and nothing more. Incredible? Yes, to the old theologians. But I have proved it. He tries to curry favor, to worm or buy his way into our midst, to draw attention to himself. How shall we handle him? Well, how do we usually handle *hoi polloi?* We turn our backs on them. We refuse to admit that they exist. In short, we snub them — and they go away."

Dr. Furnwillie, his eyes flashing enthusiasm and good will, stood up and came to Dr. Vole, who was distinctly blue around the gills. He helped him to his feet, and steered him tenderly toward the door. "You must snub Satan, Dr. Vole," he said. "Ignore your worries, and they will go away. Yes, and read Emerson. How simple it all is!"

"B-bu —"

"My secretary will show you out. Don't forget, now — E-M-E-R-S-O-N. And do come by again —"

Dr. Vole stumbled down a corridor and out into the street. Feeling himself alone and friendless, he sat down and wept. But presently, perhaps as a result of Dr. Furnwillie's therapeutic potion, he happened to recall a high school playmate whom he had not seen for several years. Hope flickered faintly in his breast. "Ol' frien's, bes' frien's," he thought sentimentally. "Why not? *They* have them all the time!"

He hailed another cab. And twenty minutes later, clammily sober, he entered the gymnasium of one of the many colleges named after St. Ignatius of Loyola. There he found his friend, appropriately garbed, working out with Indian clubs.

"Hi, Spike!" moaned Dr. Vole.

His friend lifted a bushy brow. "Hi, Jitters," he replied coldly. "How's atheism?"

Uncomfortably, Dr. Vole recalled that certain statements of his own had caused a protracted rupture of relations. He sat down on a convenient bench, hiccupped humbly, and addressed Horatio in the most dismal tones.

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His friend promptly dropped the clubs.

"Spike — I mean, Father Crabtree — I need your help."

Father Crabtree surveyed him doubtfully. He beheld the clear evidences of despair. He frowned — Jitters had been a pretty good kid back in his innocent pre-Freudian days. Perhaps — Abruptly, a picture came to him of Dr. Manfred Vole, attired in the rough habiliments of the Trappist order, piously hoeing turnips in the Wyoming wilderness.

He came over, and sat beside the doctor, and said, "Tell me about it, Jitters," in the voice he had heard his superiors use on roughly similar occasions.

After half an hour, Dr. Vole left the college, his head erect, a new spring in his walk. But his own hopes for his personal future were not at all like Father Crabtree's. For the first time since the appearance of the poltergeist, he was thinking of the Cadillac.

The happenings of the next few days were mildly puzzling to Constance Poppledore. She now remembered how that horrid man, her father, had tweaked her pigtails by way of punishment; and sometimes, when she considered the insolence of this mistreatment, the piano would start joggling up and down, or maybe a phone book would fly across the room. She had retrieved the dark experience — and the poltergeist. But was that anything to get upset about?

First there was that funny Dr. Vole, returning the same evening with all his talk about the Roman Church and someone named Horatio, and a petition to the Archbishop to exorcise the poltergeist. Not that it wasn't nice to have *them* on her side — but she certainly wouldn't have signed the petition if the doctor hadn't promised to use his medical connections to find a leper.

Then, at the party, that convert from Bombay came right out and insulted her! He told her how his fellow Hindus suffered, and that they had lots and lots of lepers there. And, when she asked if he would send her one by plane, he lost his temper — even though she offered to pay the fare both ways.

Ever since, there had been just one thing after another. Just for fun, she had shown off the poltergeist to Canon Bunny, and he'd been almost as upset as Dr. Vole — but more polite about it, naturally. The newspapers had started calling her to ask if it was true that something startling was going to happen at the Canon's Sunday services, and they hadn't believed her when she denied it, and they hadn't given her the least bit of help in trying to find a leper. Finally, on Tuesday, Dr. Vole had phoned to tell her that the Archbishop's investigator was coming on Thursday afternoon.

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Excitedly, Constance Poppledore spent Thursday morning selecting her apparel for the visitation. Out of deference to the Archbishop, she finally chose a lavender *peignoir* expensively contrived to suggest a friar's habit complete with cowl and cord. Congratulating herself on the felicity of this chance purchase, she brought a copy of Flaubert's *Temptation Of St. Anthony* from Julian's bookcase, and placed it with a dish of grapes and a pair of studious spectacles beside her couch.

It was thus that, shortly after luncheon, she greeted the Reverend Mathias Gansfleisch, O.F.M.

She was disappointed. She had expected a Savonarola, tall and terrible and burning-eyed, with bell, book, candle, and stoup of holy water. Instead, she saw a very thick old man with a bald, pear-shaped head, who walked as though his shoes pinched. He was accompanied by Dr. Vole, who performed the introductions, and by two middle-aged clerics bearing brief cases — and it was immediately apparent that he disapproved of her.

"Father Gansfleisch," asserted the awed Dr. Vole, "is Visitor General of the Order of Friars Minor. He is an Exorcist. He holds a Doctorate of Sacred Theology and *three* Ph.D.'s."

"It is correct," said the Franciscan.

"Canon Bunny," boasted Constance Poppledore, "almost got to be a Rhodes scholar."

There was no response.

"He's an honorary canon — of a cathedral, I think. He doesn't spend much time at it, because he's the Rector of St. Ethelred's-at-Sea, and everybody just adores him. I'm sure you'd love him too, in spite of Mildred. Of course, he's not a *Roman* Catholic, but he always says that after all he is a fellow traveller."

There was a frigid silence.

"Besides," she persisted, heedless of the faces Dr. Vole was making, "it's not as if he and Mildred were, well, *really* married. I mean, when you see the poor old thing in one of her dreadful hats, you simply can't imagine —" Still silence.

She extended the dish of grapes; and the Exorcist drew back as though an ingratiating serpent had offered him an apple.

"Do you make a mockery?" he snapped at Dr. Vole. "You told me an innocent soul was in grave danger. Bah! I can see nothing to investigate!"

"P-p-possession!" stammered Dr. Vole.

Constance Poppledore clapped her hands. "It's nine points of the law, isn't it? But really I'm not worried about my poltergeist, Father. You see, I'm sure it's just my Id!"

And then, before the doctor could think of a reply —

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"It's Canon Bunny, ma'am," announced the maid. "He's brought a friend."

The pastor of St. Ethelred's-at-Sea pumped Father Gansfleisch's unresponsive hand, greeted Dr. Vole like a long-lost brother, and smiled a nervous benediction at Constance Poppledore.

"Dear me! I've worried so — and now I see I needn't have at all!" He glowed. "Such reinforcements of sanctity and learning! Our little differences forgotten in adversity! I wish it weren't too late to mention it in *Peace Of Heart*. Perhaps the next edition —"

"He'll put your name in and everything!" cried Constance Poppledore. "Won't that be splendid, Father Gansfleisch?"

"No. It will not."

"Well —" Canon Bunny coughed. "— we're all up against something we don't understand, aren't we? That's why I thought I'd do my little bit — ha-ha! — to arm the bastions of the Spirit with the guns of Science." He beckoned to a small man shifting his feet uneasily at the door. "This is Dr. Espey of Duke University, where they study all these things. He'll be a great help to us, I'm sure."

Dr. Espey mumbled that hadn't he better — er — well — come back tomorrow?

"No, no, no!" protested Mrs. Poppledore. "Why, it'll be such *fun!* All of you after my poor little poltergeist at once! Father Gansfleisch can ring his bell, and Professor Espey can take photographs or something. And Canon Bunny can read the Song Of Solomon aloud — he does it beautifully!"

V. Bede Bunny reddened. "Only — only in sermons."

"And then, on Saturday, you must *all* come to our party for *Peace Of Heart*, and we can tell everybody how you chased my poltergeist away!"

Deliberately, Father Gansfleisch turned to the man from Duke. "I should like to ask — do you, a man of science, have an hypothesis about the poltergeist?"

"I shall assume," said Dr. Espey, "that you refer to poltergeists in general, and not necessarily to any specific specimen which may be present locally. In that sense, I consider *poltergeist* simply a term for whatever it is that causes otherwise unexplainable manifestations of a senseless nature — stone-throwing, bed-shaking, and so on. It is usually associated with an adolescent of — of retarded intellect."

They both regarded the thirtyish Mrs. Poppledore.

"The phenomena persist for a few weeks and then die down. There seems to be no serious malice behind them, and no great harm is done."

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"You do not think that there can be danger to an immortal soul?"

"Well — frankly, no. I don't think that any exterior agent is responsible. Perhaps some latent psychokinetic faculty emerges —"

"That's what I tried to tell you!" put in Constance Poppledore. "It's my Id."

"In a manner of speaking, yes. Some submerged part of — well, her mentality."

"An interesting theory," declared Father Gansfleisch. "Perhaps we can observe together. However —" He glanced at Canon Bunny. "— it will not be necessary to read aloud the Canticle."

"I had no intention, sir," puffed the Canon, "of doing so!"

Father Gansfleisch waved a peremptory hand. "Let us proceed!"

"Is there something *I* can do?" sniffed Constance Poppledore sarcastically.

"Think of your papa being mean to you," coaxed Dr. Vole.

"Oh, well. I'll try." She removed the spectacles, pulled the cowl forward over her head, and ate a grape.

After a minute, she ate another; then, a third. Nothing stirred. Nothing flew.

They waited, Father Gansfleisch stolid in his chair, Dr. Espey acutely observant, Canon Bunny fidgeting. Several additional grapes disappeared.

When half an hour had passed, the Exorcist pulled out a large steel watch. "*Well?*" he said.

"*Please*, Mrs. Poppledore," begged Dr. Vole, "do try!"

"I *am*. I'm trying hard!" She sulked. "If you think you can do any better, go get your own old poltergeists!"

Father Gansfleisch rose. "I have seen enough," he proclaimed. "I shall report to the Archbishop this absurdity. I can only hope that Dr. Vole has been deluded, without a part in planning this. As for you, Mrs. Poppledore —"

His two clerics ranged themselves beside him.

"— you should have shame!"

Constance Poppledore turned over lazily, letting a golden sandal dangle from a pale pink toe. "Well, I think you're a horrid old man!" she tossed back over her shoulder. "And anyhow you can't heal lepers like Canon Bunny can!"

Father Gansfleisch gasped. So did the clerics. So did Canon Bunny.

"Oh!" Her hand flew to her mouth. "I shouldn't have said that!"

"Indeed!" blurted the Canon. "*Indeed* —!" His eyes darted from Father Gansfleisch, striding out, to Dr. Espey. "I'm afraid that we must go!" he croaked. "We really must!"

A moment later, Constance Poppledore was alone with Dr. Vole. She

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turned to him, all smiles. "That awful man! Do you think I'd let him watch my poltergeist after he was so mean to poor Canon Bunny? I simply lay there and thought of flowers and birds, and of how maybe we could find a leper after all. I never thought of Papa even once!"

A floor-lamp hopped up and down. A driftwood book-end thumped against the wall.

"I guess I can do what I want with my own poltergeist!" said Constance Poppledore.

Though Julian Poppledore's office overlooked the Rummage House roof garden, the gay clatter from *Peace Of Heart*'s pre-publication party tempted him not at all.

"Damn the poltergeist!" he shouted, across the executive expanses of his desk. "It's lepers I'm losing sleep about! Get a load of this!" He shoved a newspaper at Dr. Vole.

The doctor blinked at a page two headline. BISHOP TO PROBE MIRACLE PUBLICITY, he read. *Peace Of Heart Author Denies Loaves-Fishes Rumor.*

"Look, Vole! The Bunny book is strictly for the *high*-class trade. This stuff'll ruin it! Two bishops came to see me yesterday. The papers are phoning every fifteen minutes. Winchell has started talking about Lazarus. Furnwillie keeps telling me to ignore the whole business. And you — you sit there doing nothing!" He snatched the paper back. "Well, get this! You straighten Connie out before tomorrow — or else!"

"Or — what?"

"Or no Cadillac!"

Flushing, Dr. Vole assumed the dignity of his diploma. "The purpose of psychiatry," he said, "is not merely to extract an idea like a tooth, but to adjust the entire personality. Mrs. Poppledore's innocent affection for Canon Bunny, her desire for a miracle — these are only two strands in a dark pattern which still requires patient exploration and sympathetic therapy."

Mr. Poppledore made a rude noise. "Any more of that stuff, and I turn you and your spook-hunter over to the A.M.A. No fee. No Cadillac. Maybe no license."

Dr. Vole realized that the threat against his license was a strategic exaggeration, but the possibility of publicizing his momentary lapse from Freudian grace did not appeal to him.

More reasonably, he said, "I shall do what I can, Mr. Poppledore. But you mustn't expect miracles."

"I don't. That's why I'm making damn sure nobody with as much as a

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pimple gets in that church tomorrow. I've hired the best detective agency in town. Their men are going to be at every door. Otherwise, I'm holding you responsible."

Mr. Poppledore relaxed his frown, displaying the forehead which made his pictures look so intellectual in *The Saturday Review*. He rose. "Shall we join the party?" he suggested pleasantly.

"Er — yes," replied Dr. Vole.

And they walked out together, almost arm in arm, into the throng of critics, clerics, purveyors of literary merchandise, and friends. Immediately, two intense Communists accosted them, exhibited a volume piquantly entitled *Collectivistic Peace Of Conditioned Reaction In The Workers' And Peasants' Socialistic State*, and, before they managed to escape, shouted that it had been translated from the Russian long before anyone ever heard of the war-mongering Rabbi Liebman.

"Where is Canon Bunny?" panted Mr. Poppledore at a middle-aged lady.

"The Vulnerable Bede? Mrs. Poppledore's right behind me, so he must be 'way over there. He's been acting funny ever since she came — like maybe she'd got leprosy or something."

Mr. Poppledore winced. "Take care of Connie," he hissed at Dr. Vole, and vanished in the crowd.

The doctor found Constance Poppledore talking to the Archimandrite Pyotru, of the Near-Eastern Semi-Orthodox Church, who consisted of a square black hat, an enormous red robe, and a big black beard with lots of teeth in it.

". . . so whenever I think of Papa, things start flying all by themselves, but I'm not afraid of it, not any more, now that I know it's just my —" She broke off, catching sight of Dr. Vole. "Why, here he is now!" she exclaimed. "If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't have a poltergeist at all."

The Archimandrite, who was ambidextrously depleting a platter of *hors d'oeuvres*, grinned at the doctor between two anchovies, and roared, "O-ho-ho-ho! Thinks vly yin ehr!"

"Exactly!" cried Constance Poppledore. "Look —"

The table, the *horsd'oeuvres*, and an advance copy of *Peace Of Heart* rose three feet in the air, hovered for a moment, and came down again.

"Ya!" boomed the Archimandrite, helping himself to the salami. "Vine Amerigun mazhine vor delefission! Thinks vly!"

"Mrs. Poppledore," said Dr. Vole. "I hate to interrupt, but are you still determined to find yourself a leper?"

"A leper?" murmured Constance Poppledore. "Oh, dear me, no! I realized this morning that scrofula would be every bit as good — and now I've an idea that's even better yet."

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"Make vly!" The Archimandrite waved a pickle violently. "More, more!"

Somebody's handbag thumped into the lap of an astonished swami — and Constance Poppledore giggled girlishly. "That's nothing! Weight doesn't mean anything at all. Watch this!"

Some yards away, an Australian tea tree grew in a huge porcelain tub. She gestured at it. It began to rise. The Archimandrite applauded gleefully.

The potted tree rose six inches in the air. It tipped first one way, then the other. Then —

Suddenly she squealed. The roof shook as the tree came crashing down. There was a silence.

"Mazhinė vus bruk?" exclaimed the Archimandrite. "Zum dube blow-sout?"

"*There* she is!" Constance Poppledore, all rigid, was pointing at a small, round woman who clung to Canon Bunny's arm in the far corner; and Dr. Vole saw that the woman was wearing a flat and unremarkable straw hat.

"*Ugh!*" whispered Mrs. Poppledore with venom. "Can't you just see her ears *wiggle?* And now my Id won't work again for hours!" She stamped her foot. "Well, anyhow —" surprisingly, she smiled "— she doesn't know about my big surprise tomorrow. When he's famous, he'll owe it all to me."

Dr. Manfred Vole, after endeavoring vainly to cajole Constance Poppledore into disclosing her secret, spent an almost sleepless night, his imagination presenting him, alternately, with a panorama of the loathsome maladies more readily obtainable, and with a foretaste of the rigors of a Cadillac-less existence. He entered St. Ethelred's-at-Sea, next morning, in poor spirits.

Mr. Poppledore, accompanied by Dr. Furnwillie and by two ominously muscular men with beady eyes, intercepted him at the door, warned him to stay right next to Connie, and delayed him just long enough to prevent his doing so. He found the front pew full, and barely managed to squeeze himself into the one behind it.

At first, craning his neck and squirming, he irritated the spinster to his left and evoked angry grunts from a bulky, egg-bald gentleman who pressed against him from the right.

Presently, though, he started to relax, reassured by the clear complexions of the congregation and by the absence of strangers in the pew ahead. Mrs. Poppledore sat on the aisle, with Mr. and Mrs. Henry Rummage close beside her. Then came the pale horse, the Archimandrite Pyotru in full canonicals, the heads of several Rummage House departments, and — almost immediately in front of him — Mildred Bunny, flanked by two little Bunnies, male, aged eight and twelve respectively.

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He sighed, rubbed his red-rimmed eyes, and settled back. After a while, his last remaining shred of apprehension disappeared. Half dozing, half awake, he dreamed about the Cadillac convertible. Even the sight of Canon Bunny, splendidly attired (as a sharp feminine voice behind him pointed out) in everything but the Triple Crown, did not disturb his reveries. And it was only when the sermon was about to start that he was jerked cruelly out of them.

"W-what's *that?*" gasped the spinster suddenly.

Dr. Vole sat up, all his fears returning. He could see nothing. No one exhibited a ravaged face or mutilated member. The aisles were empty. The lame, the halt, the blind were absent.

Canon Bunny was just entering the carven eminence of his pulpit —

"*There!*" cried the spinster. "I *knew* I saw it move!"

She pointed, her finger trembling — and, as she did so, a crimson faldstool slowly rose six inches, moved nimbly to the left, and came down again. An instant later, as though experimentally, it rose again and resumed its place.

Full realization hit Dr. Manfred Vole between the eyes. All thought of physical afflictions vanished from his mind. The yellow Cadillac popped like a bubble and disappeared in limbo.

The Canon cleared his throat. "Dearly beloved —" he began, benignly.

The doctor saw that Constance Poppledore was leaning forward tensely. Then, in a flash, the memory of what had happened to the potted tea tree came back to him. Constance Poppledore, obviously, had not seen Mildred Bunny. There was a chance. A chance to salvage all!

He darted a covert glance to either side. His neighbors seemed to be ignoring him. Unobtrusively, his hand stole forward — toward the narrow aperture where Mrs. Bunny's plump posterior pressed against the pew —

"Dearly beloved, by a strange coincidence, many months ago I chose for my text today these words out of Ecclesiastes —" The Canon beamed. " '— To the making of many books there is no end —' "

Three inches from their vulnerable objective, the doctor's forefinger and thumb poised threateningly. An instant — and the Canon's wife would scream, would leap erect. Her hat's long, floppy ears would wiggle for Mrs. Poppledore —

A huge hand clamped his wrist.

"A pincher, eh?" whispered the bulky person in his ear. "Oh, no you don't! Not in a church! You ought to be asham —"

He did not finish. There was a dreadful hush.

Slowly, with all the dignity of a well-filled balloon, the Reverend Canon V. Bede Bunny was rising in the air. Two feet, five feet, ten —

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At first, he seemed surprised. But, having been taken up, he was, if nothing else, quick on the uptake. At fifteen feet, his countenance composed itself in sweet humility. At twenty, he brought his hands together as though in prayer. At thirty-five, picking up forward speed, he leaned a little forward, in the attitude of the more accomplished seraphim.

Mildred Bunny writhed — and, momentarily, a tiny ray of hope gleamed in the doctor's heart. Then it, too, died. Her offspring were standing in their seats, waving ecstatically at their airborne parent. But she had fainted.

"O-ho-ho-ho!" the Archimandrite roared. "Zo clefer delefission! Iss vly!"

Somebody screamed. Batteries of flash-bulbs opened fire. And Dr. Vole, following the Canon's progress in despair, caught Constance Poppledore's eye.

She waved at him. She smiled excitedly. Her mouth formed words. They were inaudible, but he saw what they were. "*Don't worry, dear Dr. Vole,*" she said. "*It's just my Id!*"

Triumphantly, she put the Canon through his paces. He dipped and soared. He banked and swerved. Climbing suddenly, he performed a perfect Immelman turn. With a *whoosh,* he dived and, flying backwards, hedge-hopped the bobbing bonnets of his congregation —

And it was then, just as he levelled off, that the elder of Mildred Bunny's children accomplished that which Dr. Vole had tried to do in vain. He clutched his mother's arm. He shook it violently. "Gee, Mama, *look!*" he yelled. "Daddy's got *anti-grav!*"

Mildred Bunny regained consciousness. She shook herself. She staggered to her feet. "*Venable!*" she called hysterically. "You come right *down* from there!"

Dr. Vole saw Mrs. Poppledore turn her head. He saw her fix her gaze on Mildred Bunny's hat. Instinctively, he ducked —

For an instant, the Canon stayed suspended — but only for an instant. He started folding in the middle. Abruptly, with a frightened squawk, he fell.

Fortunately, the Archimandrite's well-upholstered lap was immediately under him.

Dr. Manfred Vole played no part in resolving the pandemonium which, at the Canon's landing, engulfed St. Ethelred's-at-Sea. In a daze, he watched his bulky neighbor vanish in the throng. Still in a daze, he watched him reappear with Mr. Poppledore's detectives at his heels, and take command. He found himself pushed, shoved, prodded forward. Finally, in a corner, surrounded by the occupants of the front pew, he was corralled. Not until

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several minutes later, when the last protesting worshippers and reporters had been herded out, did he realize that the net of the Law had enmeshed them all.

Deliberately, the bulky man locked the great doors of St. Ethelred's. Deliberately, he pocketed the key and strode across the church. As he faced them, his eyes were hard; his jaw was grim.

"He's from the *FBI!*" whispered the pale horse right into Dr. Vole's left ear.

"Ooh, Secret Service!" bleated Mrs. Henry Rummage, in his right.

"An oudraitch!" Wildly, the Archimandrite waved his arms. "You zecret bolice! Me, who is un-Amerigan citizen, you could nod arrest! I call my Gonsul! I —"

Mr. Julian Poppledore perspired and puffed. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Release us instantly, I say! My congressman shall hear of it! My senator shall —"

"*Sit down,*" said the bulky man.

Mr. Poppledore sat.

"All right." The man opened his billfold and showed them a large card. "That's who I am. It ought to be enough, but I'll explain. Reverend Bunny here —" He indicated the rumpled Canon, huddling with his small family some distance from the rest. "— was seen to rise into the air without any visible means of propulsion or support, and to fly successfully for a considerable period of time. The natural assumption — supported by the remark of his own son — is that some anti-gravity device has been employed. If that is the case, the present state of international affairs will make it necessary to apply full security measures, and —"

"Why, how *exciting!*" gasped Constance Poppledore. "We'll all be classified Top Secret, like — like a bomb or something. Although it really isn't anything like *that.* It's purely spiritual, and dear Canon Bunny tells all about it in *Peace Of Heart.* That's his book, you know, the one we're bringing out this week."

The bulky man made a brief note. "I'm afraid," he said, "that it may be necessary to defer the publication of that book indefinitely —"

Julian Poppledore uttered a hollow groan.

"As for you people — well, we'll have to wait until we hear from Washington, except for this man here." He glared down his nose at Dr. Vole. "He's just a pincher. We'll turn him over to the city police."

"I'm not!" The doctor flushed. "I'm a psychiatrist. I came to be beside my patient, Mrs. Poppledore."

Julian Poppledore gave him a look of utter loathing. "We never saw the man before in my life," he stated flatly.

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"Oh, that's not *true!* Julian's just being mean. If it hadn't been for Dr. Vole, and how he fixed my Id, there would not have been a miracle at all!"

The Archimandrite was spitting foreign objurgations through his beard. The staff of Rummage House was twittering nervously. Mildred Bunny was snuffling into her sodden handkerchief. And the Canon, ignoring the awed questions of his progeny, was staring fearfully at Constance Poppledore and muttering something about Babylon. Of the assemblage, only the Reverend Winton Furnwillie appeared quite self-possessed. He now looked up from a small volume of Emerson, which he habitually carried with him, smiled gravely, and in a loud, clear voice said, "*Nonsense!*"

"Huh?" said the bulky man.

"I said the word, 'Nonsense.' It was a comment on the foregoing conversation. I am, if I may say so, an authority on Satan, who seems to have been busy here today —"

"For Pete's sake, Furnwillie," breathed Julian Poppledore, "haven't we lost enough sales already? Do you have to go putting your big foot in it too?"

"*Shush*," said Dr. Furnwillie reprovingly. "We must be practical. It is quite obvious that there has been no miracle." He peered significantly at the Canon. "I can assure you of *that*. And I can also say that nothing of a scientific nature is involved. If it were, the instrument could not be spirited away. It still would be about the person of one of us, where a brief search would certainly reveal it. Do you not find that very simple and very logical?"

Reluctantly, the bulky man conceded that Dr. Furnwillie might have a point. "But all the same," he said, "I did see him fly myself. How about that?"

"You did not see him *fly*. You saw him rise some distance in the air. There is a difference." Dr. Furnwillie pointed at the ceiling. "There, sir, is your explanation. Like so many too-ostentatious churches, St. Ethelred's-at-Sea is carelessly designed and poorly situated. It is surrounded by tall buildings. Its vast, high windows are scarcely suitable for proper ventilation. Under such circumstances, curious and powerful currents of air come into being — up-drafts they're called. And with the obvious lifting power of our dear friend's capacious vestments — Well, need I say more?"

Oh, good boy, Furnwillie, thought Mr. Poppledore fervently. *Let's get in there and pitch!*

"All right, all right, I'll search them." The bulky man sounded a little frantic. "But being picked up by air currents — that's pretty hard to take!"

"It does sound just a bit improbable," commented Dr. Vole.

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Dr. Furnwillie smiled at the psychiatrist. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio," he quoted gently, "than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

And the search commenced. Not one of them had said a word about the poltergeist.

Constance Poppledore left the church two hours later, arm in arm with Dr. Manfred Vole, and in fine fettle. Julian Poppledore followed two paces to the rear, making disgruntled noises.

"Dear Dr. Vole," she murmured as they reached the car, "it was *so* nice of that big man to let you go, although I'm sure he couldn't prove a thing. And now let's celebrate! Julian can drive, and you can sit behind with me." She paused to waggle a flirtatious finger. "But promise me you won't pinch!"

Dr. Vole stood on his dignity, making no reply. He followed Constance Poppledore into the car, ruefully noted that it was a Cadillac, and edged himself into his corner, as far away from her as he could get.

Julian Poppledore gnashed his teeth and then the gears, and they were on their way.

His wife sighed dreamily. "Well, it was *almost* perfect, anyhow," she said, after awhile. "At least he didn't fall so very far, and I can't help feeling that I've done him good. Wasn't it noble of him to resign his pastorate, right there and then, and tell us he was going to be a missionary in Basutoland? He'll be so happy there, among the heathens. *They* won't mind Mildred's hats — that is unless they're cannibals, of course."

"Well?" grated their driver. "Where do we drop you, Vole?"

"Oh, but we won't!" she cried. "We'll take him home! He's the only one who understands my poltergeist — and he's going to write a book!"

"Who, me?" croaked Dr. Vole.

She stretched luxuriously. She closed her eyes. "Yes, you," she sang. "It's all arranged. I thought of it this very minute, because I feel so — well, so *at rest*, and so serene. I even have the title for it —"

A horrible premonition came to Dr. Vole. "W-what?" he said.

"*Peace* —" purred Constance Poppledore. "*Peace Of Id.*"

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The F&SF policy of discovering new writers occasionally pays unexpected dividends. When Mildred Clingerman's agent submitted her first story to us, he introduced her as "a beautiful but unpublished girl"; and when later he presented her in person, we awoke with amazement (like the young girl from Peru) to find it was perfectly true. For once we regret our policy of no interior illustrations — but the important thing, to you as to us, is not the beauty of Clingerman's person but the highly attractive quality of her writing. An Arizona housewife with two children, too many cats, a weakness for overimaginative cooking, and a long-suffering husband, she has managed to translate a vast interplanetary theme into small believable domestic terms in a manner we haven't seen equaled since Bill Brown's popular The Star Ducks *(F&SF, Fall, 1950). You'll be seeing more of Mildred Clingerman soon in F&SF — and, we're sure, elsewhere.*

Minister Without Portfolio

by MILDRED CLINGERMAN

Mrs. Chriswell's little roadster came to a shuddering halt. Here was the perfect spot. Only one sagging wire fence to step over and not a cow in sight. Mrs. Chriswell was terrified of cows, and if the truth were told, only a little less afraid of her daughter-in-law, Clara. It was all Clara's idea that her mother-in-law should now be lurking in meadows peering at birds. Clara had been delighted with the birdwatching idea, but frankly, Mrs. Chriswell was bored with birds. They *flew* so much. And as for their colors, it was useless for her to speculate. Mrs. Chriswell was one of those rare women who are quite, quite color-blind.

"But, Clara," Mrs. Chriswell had pleaded, "what's the point if I can't tell what color they are?"

"Well, but, darling," Clara had said crisply, "how much cleverer if you get to know them just from the distinctive markings!"

Mrs. Chriswell, sighing a little as she recalled the firm look of Clara's chin, maneuvered herself and her burdens over the sagging wire fence. She successfully juggled the binoculars, the heavy bird book, and her purse, and thought how ghastly it was at sixty to be considered so useless that she must be provided with harmless occupations to keep her out of the way.

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Since Mr. Chriswell's death she had moved in with her son and his wife to face a life of enforced idleness. The servants resented her presence in the kitchen, so cooking was out. Clara and the snooty nursemaid would brook no interference with the nursery routine, so Mrs. Chriswell had virtually nothing to do. Even her crocheted doilies disappeared magically soon after their presentation to Clara and the modern furniture.

Mrs. Chriswell shifted the heavy bird book and considered rebelling. The sun was hot and her load was heavy. As she toiled on across the field she thought she saw the glint of sun on water. She would sit and crochet in the shade nearby and remove the big straw cartwheel hat Clara termed "just the thing."

Arrived at the trees, Mrs. Chriswell dropped her burdens and flung the hat willy-nilly. Ugly, ridiculous thing. She glanced around for the water she thought she'd seen, but there was no sign of it. She leaned back against a tree trunk and sighed blissfully. A little breeze had sprung up and was cooling the damp tendrils on her forehead. She opened her big purse and scrambled through the muddle of contents for her crochet hook and the ball of thread attached to a half-finished doily. In her search she came across the snapshots of her granddaughters — in color, they were, but unfortunately Mrs. Chriswell saw them only in various shades of gray. The breeze was getting stronger now, very pleasant, but the dratted old cartwheel monstrosity was rolling merrily down the slight grade to the tangle of berry bushes a few yards away. Well, it would catch on the brambles. But it didn't. The wind flirted it right around the bushes, and the hat disappeared.

"Fiddle!" Mrs. Chriswell dared not face Clara without the hat. Still hanging on to the bulky purse, she got up to give chase. Rounding the tangle of bushes, she ran smack into a tall young man in uniform.

"Oh!" Mrs. Chriswell said. "Have you seen my hat?"

The young man smiled and pointed on down the hill. Mrs. Chriswell was surprised to see her hat being passed from hand to hand among three other tall young men in uniform. They were laughing at it, and she didn't much blame them. They were standing beside a low, silvery aircraft of some unusual design. Mrs. Chriswell studied it a moment, but, really, she knew nothing about such things. . . . The sun glinted off it, and she realized this was what she had thought was water. The young man beside her touched her arm. She turned towards him and saw that he had put a rather lovely little metal hat on his head. He offered her one with grave courtesy. Mrs. Chriswell smiled up at him and nodded. The young man fitted the hat carefully, adjusting various little ornamental knobs on the top of it.

"Now we can talk," he said. "Do you hear well?"

"My dear boy," Mrs. Chriswell said, "of course I do. I'm not so old as all

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that." She found a smooth stone and sat down to chat. This was much nicer than birdwatching, or even crochet.

The tall young man grinned and signalled excitedly to his companions. They too put on little metal hats and came bounding up the hill. Still laughing, they deposited the cartwheel in Mrs. Chriswell's lap. She patted the stone by way of invitation, and the youngest looking one of the four dropped down beside her.

"What is your name, Mother?" he asked.

"Ida Chriswell," she said. "What's yours?"

"My name is Jord," the boy said.

Mrs. Chriswell patted his hand. "That's a nice, unusual name." The boy grabbed Mrs. Chriswell's hand and rubbed it against the smoothness of his cheek.

"You are like my Mother's Mother," the boy explained, "whom I have not seen in too long." The other young men laughed, and the boy looked abashed and stealthily wiped with his hands at a tear that slid down his nose.

Mrs. Chriswell frowned warningly at the laughter and handed him her clean pocket handkerchief, scented with lavender. Jord turned it over and over in his hands, and then tentatively sniffed at it.

"It's all right," Mrs. Chriswell said. "Use it. I have another." But Jord only breathed more deeply of the faint perfume in its folds.

"This is only the thinnest thread of melody," he said, "but, Mother Ida, it is very like one note from the Harmony Hills of home!" He passed the handkerchief all around the circle, and the young men sniffed at it and smiled.

Mrs. Chriswell tried to remember if she had ever read of the Harmony Hills, but Mr. Chriswell had always told her she was lamentably weak in Geography, and she supposed that this was one of her blank spots, like where on earth was Timbuktu? Or the Hellandgone people were always talking about? But it was rude not to make some comment. Wars shifted people about such a lot, and these boys must be homesick and weary of being strangers, longing to talk of home. She was proud of herself for realizing that they were strangers. But there was something. . . . Hard to say, really. The way they had bounded up the hill? Mountain people, perhaps, to whom hills were mere springboards to heights beyond.

"Tell me about your hills," she said.

"Wait," Jord said. "I will show you." He glanced at his leader as if for approval. The young man who had fitted her hat nodded. Jord drew a fingernail across the breast of his uniform. Mrs. Chriswell was surprised to see a pocket opening where no pocket had been before. Really, the Air Force

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did amazing things with its uniforms, though, frankly, Mrs. Chriswell thought the cut of these a bit extreme.

Carefully, Jord was lifting out a packet of gossamer material. He gently pressed the center of the packet and it blossomed out into voluminous clouds of featherweight threads, held loosely together in a weave like a giant spider web. To Mrs. Chriswell's eyes the mesh of threads was the color of fog, and almost as insubstantial.

"Do not be afraid," Jord said softly, stepping closer to her. "Bend your head, close your eyes, and you shall hear the lovely Harmony Hills of home."

There was one quick-drawn breath of almost-fear, but before she shut her eyes Mrs. Chriswell saw the love in Jord's, and in that moment she knew how rarely she had seen this look, anywhere . . . anytime. If Jord had asked it of her, it was all right. She closed her eyes and bowed her head, and in that attitude of prayer she felt a soft weightlessness descend upon her. It was as if twilight had come down to drape itself on her shoulders. And then the music began. Behind the darkness of her eyes it rose in majesty and power, in colors she had never seen, never guessed. It blossomed like flowers — giant forests of them. Their scents were intoxicating and filled her with joy. She could not tell if the blending perfumes made the music, or if the music itself created the flowers and the perfumes that poured forth from them. She did not care. She wanted only to go on forever listening to all this color. It seemed odd to be listening to color, perhaps, but after all, she told herself, it would seem just as odd to me to *see* it.

She sat blinking at the circle of young men. The music was finished. Jord was putting away the gossamer threads in the secret pocket, and laughing aloud at her astonishment.

"Did you like it, Mother Ida?" He dropped down beside her again and patted her wrinkled face, still pink with excitement.

"Oh, Jord," she said, "how lovely . . . Tell me . . ."

But the leader was calling them all to order. "I'm sorry, Mother Ida, we must hurry about our business. Will you answer some questions? It is very important."

"Of course," Mrs. Chriswell said. She was still feeling a bit dazed. "If I can. . . . If it's like the quizzes on the radio, though, I'm not very good at it."

The young man shook his head. "We," he said, "have been instructed to investigate and report on the true conditions of this . . . of the world." He pointed at the aircraft glittering in the sunlight. "We have travelled all around in that slow machine, and our observations have been accurate. . . ." He hesitated, drew a deep breath and continued. " . . . and

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perhaps we shall be forced to give an unfavorable report, but this depends a great deal on the outcome of our talk with you. We are glad you stumbled upon us. We were about to set out on a foray to secure some individual for questioning. It is our last task." He smiled. "And Jord, here, will not be sorry. He is sick for home and loved ones." He sighed, and all the other young men echoed the sigh.

"Every night," Mrs. Chriswell said, "I pray for peace on earth. I cannot bear to think of boys like you fighting and dying, and the folks at home waiting and waiting . . ." She glanced all around at their listening faces. "And I'll tell you something else," she said, "I find I can't really hate anybody, even the enemy." Around the circle the young men nodded at each other. "Now ask me your questions." She fumbled in her purse for her crochet work and found it.

Beside her Jord exclaimed with pleasure at the sight of the half-finished doily. Mrs. Chriswell warmed to him even more.

The tall young man began his grave questioning. They were very simple questions, and Mrs. Chriswell answered them without hesitation. Did she believe in God? Did she believe in the dignity of man? Did she truly abhor war? Did she believe that man was capable of love for his neighbor? The questions went on and on, and Mrs. Chriswell crocheted while she gave her answers.

At last, when the young man had quite run out of questions, and Mrs. Chriswell had finished the doily, Jord broke the sun-lazy silence that had fallen upon them.

"May I have it, Mother?" He pointed to the doily. Mrs. Chriswell bestowed it upon him with great pleasure, and Jord, like a very small boy, stuffed it greedily into another secret pocket. He pointed at her stuffed purse.

"May I look, Mother?"

Mrs. Chriswell indulgently passed him her purse. He opened it and poured the litter of contents on the ground between them. The snapshots of Mrs. Chriswell's grandchildren stared up at him. Jord smiled at the pretty little-girl faces. He groped in the chest pocket and drew out snapshots of his own. "These," he told Mrs. Chriswell proudly, "are my little sisters. Are they not like these little girls of yours? Let us exchange, because soon I will be at home with them, and there will be no need for pictures. I would like to have yours."

Mrs. Chriswell would have given Jord the entire contents of the purse if he had asked for them. She took the snapshots he offered and looked with pleasure at the sweet-faced children. Jord still stirred at the pile of possessions from Mrs. Chriswell's purse. By the time she was ready to leave he

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had talked her out of three illustrated recipes torn from magazines, some swatches of material, and two pieces of peppermint candy.

The young man who was the leader helped her to remove the pretty little hat when Mrs. Chriswell indicated he should. She would have liked to keep it, but she didn't believe Clara would approve. She clapped the straw monstrosity on her head, kissed Jord's cheek, waved goodbye to the rest, and groped her way around the berry bushes. She had to grope because her eyes were tear-filled. They had saluted her so grandly as she left.

Clara's usually sedate household was in an uproar when Mrs. Chriswell returned. All the radios in the house were blaring. Even Clara sat huddled over the one in the library. Mrs. Chriswell heard a boy in the street crying "EXTRA! EXTRA!" and the upstairs maid almost knocked her down getting out the front door to buy one. Mrs. Chriswell, sleepy and somewhat sunburned, supposed it was something about the awful war.

She was just turning up the stairs to her room when the snooty nursemaid came rushing down to disappear kitchenwards with another newspaper in hand. Good, the children were alone. She'd stop in to see them. Suddenly she heard the raised voices from the back of the house. The cook was yelling at somebody. "I tell you, I saw it! I took out some garbage and there it was, right over me!" Mrs. Chriswell lingered at the foot of the stairway, puzzled by all the confusion. The housemaid came rushing in with the EXTRA edition. Mrs. Chriswell quietly reached out and took it. "Thank you, Nadine," she said. The housemaid was still staring at her as she climbed the stairs.

Edna and Evelyn were sitting on the nursery floor, a candy box between them, and shrieking at each other when their grandmother opened the door. They were cramming chocolates into their mouths between shrieks. Their faces and pinafores were smeared with the candy. Edna suddenly yanked Evelyn's hair, hard. "Pig!" she shouted. "You got three more than I did!"

"Children! Children! Not fighting?" Mrs. Chriswell was delighted. Here was something she could cope with. She led them firmly to the bathroom and washed their faces. "Change your frocks," she said, "and I'll tell you my adventure."

There were only hissing accusals and whispered counter-charges behind her as she turned her back on the children to scan the newspaper. Grandmothers, she told herself, have a calming effect on children. The headlines leapt up at her.

MYSTERIOUS BROADCAST INTERRUPTS PROGRAMS ON ALL WAVE LENGTHS.
UNKNOWN WOMAN SAVES WORLD SAY MEN FROM SPACE.
ONE SANE HUMAN FOUND ON EARTH.
COOKING, NEEDLEWORK, HOME, RELIGIOUS INTERESTS SWAY SPACE JUDGES.

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Every column of the paper was crowded with the same unintelligible nonsense. Mrs. Chriswell folded it neatly, deposited it on a table, and turned to tie her granddaughters' sashes and tell her adventure.

" . . . And then he gave me some lovely photographs. In color, he said . . . Good little girls, just like Edna and Evelyn. Would you like to see them?"

Edna made a rude noise with her mouth pursed. Evelyn's face grew saintlike in retaliation. "Yes, show us," she said.

Mrs. Chriswell passed them the snapshots, and the children drew close together for the moment before Evelyn dropped the pictures as if they were blazing. She stared hard at her grandmother while Edna made a gagging noise.

"Green!" Edna gurgled. "Gaaaa . . . green skins!"

"Grandmother!" Evelyn was tearful. "Those children are frog-colored!"

Mrs. Chriswell bent over to pick up the pictures. "Now, now, children," she murmured absently. "We don't worry about the color of people's skins. Red . . . yellow . . . black . . . we're all God's children. Asia or Africa, makes no difference. . . ." But before she could finish her thought, the nursemaid loomed disapprovingly in the doorway. Mrs. Chriswell hurried out to her own room, while some tiny worry nagged at her mind. "Red, yellow, black, white," she murmured over and over, "and brown . . . but green . . . ?" Geography had always been her weak point. Green . . . Now where on earth . . . ?

Note:

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Most readers know that J. J. Coupling is a first-rate writer of true science *fiction; that under another name he is a prominent scientist; and that he has grand fun mixing his two identities. Once, for instance, he addressed a learned dinner under both by-lines (with and without beard); and he has let his serious scientific self indulge in the most fascinating science-fictional speculations as to the creation of language and music by pure mathematical odds and chances. Here, however, is the first published evidence that Mr. Coupling is not only a double but a triple personality: He also writes supernatural fantasy, and manages to infuse into it the rigorous detailed thinking of his science and his science fiction — plus a biting observation of the ideals of a petty personality.*

The Good Life

by J. J. COUPLING

THEIR MARRIAGE was probably a belated tribute to *Arrowsmith*. In a romantic corner of Sylvia's mind there had lingered a picture of the devoted young medical scientist conquering the plague — or something. In spite of his name, Homer Haskins slipped into the mental niche immediately.

He was not a doctor but a psychologist. This seemed almost as good as being a doctor to Sylvia; it called up pictures of Freud. Homer was doing research on what he called the influence of connotation and context. He was not bad-looking. He had, it appeared, some money. Not wealth, perhaps, but in those days it was enough to support him comfortably and to enable him to carry out his work at an institution which could not (and probably would not) have financed it. Far from New York, the unattained Mecca of Sylvia's soul, here in this frowsy town whose chief glory was the college trying to be a university, he was an approach, almost, to glamor.

Homer managed the courtship slowly, despite Sylvia's sometimes almost desperate encouragement. He chose the oddest and dullest things to talk about. He was abstracted rather than distracted. But he was appreciative. There grew in Sylvia's soul a motherly feeling, a longing to care for this irresponsible scientist. It was derived from scraps of most of the books she had read. This seemed almost love to her, and it seemed entirely love to Homer. His apprehension of it jolted him into a proposal which was fol-

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lowed by unhesitating acceptance. So we find Sylvia and Homer in a state of wedlock.

It is hard for the initial stages of marriage not to be happy and exciting. People have such a momentum of expectation that it carries them right past their senses. Homer had been suddenly awakened to something he had scarcely considered. Sylvia was enthralled, and especially because the honeymoon was in New York. Then disillusion came and the city was almost disappointing. This was not the New York toward which she had strained from afar. There were, of course, theaters and concerts and night clubs. The real lack was in the people. She and Homer met only a few psychologists just as fusty as those they had known. Several of these had homes in the suburbs, with wives and children. Their talk was trivial and dull and not at all like that in the books she had read. Somehow, the witty people and the exciting happenings were unavailable to strangers.

There was some little excitement, perhaps, in the prospect of visiting a real live Communist, who had been a friend of Homer's father. But even this turned out all wrong. The Communist was a short, worn, gray-haired man, and his wife was a plump, motherly person. They lived in a dingy, conventional apartment on Eighteenth Street. They were schoolteachers, Sylvia found. They talked with Homer about some small mid-western town where he had been born, and about Gus Kendrick and other unknown characters, while Sylvia examined a war map on the wall. The pins showed the lines in the Spanish Civil War, which was then drawing to a close.

"It's not up to date," Sylvia remarked, to show that she read the papers.

The conversation stopped for a moment.

"I haven't changed it the past few weeks," the gray-haired man apologized, looking still a bit more worn, and then he and Homer resumed their talk. The motherly woman gave them tea, and after a little they left.

Even though New York had been a disappointment, it came as a shock to find on their return that New York had now become unavailable. It could not be managed again on Homer's income, which was after all not wealth but only a competence, or a little less when two shared it.

It was disturbing, too, to find that Homer really was a serious young scientist, though he didn't seem young now. He had little time to discuss important things with her, even in those few moments when she herself had time after taking care of the house and entertaining dull friends of his. He never read, either, except for dull and unintelligible books about psychology, and about the physiology of the brain.

Sylvia knew that he made experiments with students, and with rats, too, but she wasn't exactly clear about what he did. Several times she tried to get out of him just what it was that he was doing. It seemed to be about achiev-

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ing effects by means beyond the mere sense of the words used, or the mechanical consequences of acts, for that matter. In psychiatry and medicine, for instance —

At this, Sylvia brightened.

"Oh," she said, "like obtaining transference in psychoanalysis."

But Homer qualified.

"Well," he said, "like whatever it is that makes people get well under treatment."

"But that's all understood," Sylvia insisted. "It's a science now, I mean, since Freud —"

Homer had just looked rather foolish.

"People got well before Freud, you know," he said. "At Lourdes, for instance. And Mesmer. Even Benjamin Franklin didn't see what was going on there. African witch doctors cure people, and kill them, too. People have to want to get well, though, and to believe that they will get well in order to be cured. I'd like to find out what makes them believe."

"But psychoanalysis is science," Sylvia pointed out, "and the witch doctor isn't. Of course," she added, "I've read all about psychosomatic medicine. And as for Lourdes," she went on, "of course there must be more to life than just the material. A girl I know has a friend who saw some things in Haiti," she added. "And of course I've read William Seabrook."

But Homer seemed unconvinced.

"I want to find out," he repeated.

"Witch doctor," Sylvia taunted. "Could you cure anyone?"

Homer shook his head and looked troubled.

"I don't know," he said.

After that they talked about other things. Sylvia tried to get Homer to read important books, books about all the rest of the world and especially about New York. He politely started them, but she always found them with the marker very near the front. When she read to him from *The New Yorker* or from more serious magazines such as *The New Republic* he listened with so little expression and so much abstraction that the reading didn't entertain Sylvia herself. Homer couldn't at all understand that this was the real world, of which Sylvia was a part.

And when Sylvia had looked among Homer's books, she found nothing that meant anything, really, anything human, or that she could understand, except one small volume. It was a treatise on, of all things, witchcraft, and Homer said that he didn't know where it had come from, but he thought it had been included by mistake in a parcel of secondhand books. It had queer and entertaining illustrations, and Sylvia thought that William Seabrook would have liked it. Sometimes she felt that the book was the only

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thing Homer had given to her real self, her soul, that is. In all the rest he had merely rather inadequately cared for her body.

Most of the spells in the book were quite unintelligible and called for ingredients which were unobtainable or revolting. Otherwise Sylvia would have tried them out of curiosity. Only one seemed at all practicable. It described a powder and procedure for freeing the soul. Sylvia felt that this could not be suicide, for the powder was made just out of things which were in the kitchen. She liked to think of it as dangerous, however, and perhaps she reserved this spell subconsciously as a gesture to be used in dire straits.

When Sylvia had endured a child the straits were dire indeed, and especially since Homer's income was still just what it had been when they were married, before the imminence of war had raised prices and brought scarcity. Homer had insisted on the child, and indeed it had seemed a fine thing in some ways. Before the event, Sylvia was very happy in a lazy sort of way, and Homer did a great deal to make it easy for her — always serving her body, she thought.

But caring for a child was different. It was hard and unpleasant, and it took all her time, all of that precious time which she had spent with magazines and books and in thinking thoughts of New York. Homer was delighted and still helpful. But Sylvia was in Hell.

So one particularly unbearable evening when the child was ill, Sylvia tried the spell, feeling very brave and heroic in doing so. She said the crazy verse and slipped the powder into her mouth in the kitchen, while Homer stood beside her unknowing.

The spell took effect immediately. Her body staggered. Homer caught it in alarm. Sylvia herself (her soul, that is) watched in amusement. For she had flowed right out of her body's nostrils and coalesced into an apparently invisible entity which hovered above the top of her body's head.

Much to Sylvia's surprise, her body did not fall. It apparently had skills of its own, acquired in living perhaps. It was pale but competent without a soul. Homer helped it, led it to a chair, gave it a little drink of brandy. To Sylvia's amusement, the body spoke and said in a somewhat toneless voice, "I'm better now, Homer."

But Sylvia's soul was bored. And so she tried her powers and flew through the house and then straight through the closed door and to the campus and about it. She flew to the second floor of the administration building and peered into the window of the president's office. She was disappointed to find him dictating decorously to his pretty secretary. She skirted the ridiculous spire of the chapel. All afternoon and evening she flew wonderingly around the little town and spied on the little people. There must be better than this, she reflected.

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As she began to understand the extent of her powers, her soul grew dizzy at their scope. It was torn every which way — toward the books she had read and their authors, toward the movies she had seen and Hollywood, toward the important magazines she read, but above all, toward New York, and plays, and people. She paused in mid-air, trying to decide which to explore first. Her soul felt exhilarated, dizzy — and finally, panicky. Sylvia felt as if she might fly off in all directions at once. And where would her soul be then? So quickly she flew back to her body. It was late at night. The body was fed and Homer and it were asleep. She sank into the motionless figure. It stirred in a dreamy restlessness. In the morning, she woke just as she had before this incredible experience.

After that, escape was easy for Sylvia. She could leave her body whenever its routine became burdensome, and that was often. The body took care of itself and of the house and the child and Homer quite competently. Homer seemed content, even happy. The poor fool didn't know the difference between herself and what she left behind. Or perhaps — did all people have souls?

But the disembodied life of her soul had its difficulties for Sylvia. It was exasperating, and more, to be able to see, and hear, and yet not to speak. There was that terrible time (it happened much later) when she hovered all night in a dingy apartment, having followed a quarreling man and woman in from the street. The woman had flung herself on the bed and fallen asleep. All night long, for as long as Sylvia had stayed, the man had sat at a table, drinking and alternately picking up a pistol and laying it down again. Frantically, Sylvia had tried to wake the woman, shouting, waving, feeling she could some way make herself known. How was it that one passed into a body? It was so easy with her own. But here there was no way, no channel of communication. She had rushed outside, up the street and down, seeking aid without knowing how to summon it. Finally she had returned, to watch, horror-struck and fascinated, while the man wavered trying to make up his befuddled mind. Sometimes it seemed that sleep would overcome him. As morning neared he was still fumbling, weeping and drinking. But then the sense of giddiness came to Sylvia's soul, and she tore herself away fearfully and hurried back to her body. She never learned what had happened, and the incident recurred to her in times of unease, and she shuddered.

But it was not only in the inability to act that Sylvia found her disembodied wanderings unsatisfactory. It was so hard — well, to belong, when one came as an unintroduced and invisible phantom. It was hard to understand, even. There was that first night backstage, for instance. There was so little of the glamor of the theater and so much of — confusion.

Of course, she should have gone better prepared. And she hadn't counted

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on the time difference in flying east — it was between the first and second acts when she arrived. She swept right past the doorman into the midst of it all. People in small groups were standing about and talking while the stagehands worked. At first, she couldn't even identify anyone she had heard of. Obviously, she couldn't listen to them all at once. After a moment of indecision, she hovered beside two young men. One was leaning against a flat and looking a little bored while the other talked.

"Leslie's stock was doing *As You Like It* and I was playing Charles then. That afternoon Rita had told Bob Evans — he was Orlando — that she was through with him. We were at Graciano's all afternoon, and when we got on the stage for the wrestling match it was all we could do to hold each other up. Bob almost fell himself, instead of me. Well, after that, Custis —"

But at that moment, Sylvia was distracted by a hoarse shout from a short man in his shirt sleeves, who rushed down a narrow stairs calling, "Where's Lily? Tell them to play it again. You," he shouted in the direction of the two young men, "have you seen her?" And he turned away without waiting for an answer.

Neither seemed perturbed. The one leaning on the flat remarked quietly, "She's probably playing act four with Neil."

Sylvia was puzzled. The play had only three acts. Neil, as Roderick, married Lily, as Cynthia, in the last.

"Lily, and a — man?" the other young man replied, lifting his eyebrows.

But Sylvia was off already, after the bald man who was vanishing up the stairs. Just as he was about to enter a dressing-room door, illumination seemed to strike him.

"My God, why didn't I think of it before?" he shouted, and rushed back and through a door before Sylvia knew what was happening. Sylvia dashed after him, a little shocked. The closing door didn't say "Men." As she whizzed through, a luscious blonde was saying with mock indignation, "Mr. Ballin! At your age!"

But Mr. Ballin was calling, "Lily! Lily!" at the top of his voice. Then he knelt and peered under a door.

"She's here!" he shouted. "Mary, get someone," he said to the blonde.

The blonde left as Sylvia floated curiously over the door. There the renowned Lily lay, awkwardly crumpled on the floor of the compartment, under one of the oldest pieces of plumbing Sylvia had ever seen. The end of a chain was still clutched in her hand, and the heavy corroded lever which had broken free from the high tank and struck her head lay by it.

Sylvia fled to the audience, where she saw the actors as she knew them. Her soul was soon engrossed in the play, and she wept spiritual tears at the final curtain. She did not go backstage afterwards. Somehow, she did not

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particularly want to. And too, that giddy feeling had come again. She felt drawn every which way, toward all she had read and dreamed about. In a little alarm, she flew home, and sank into her body, asleep.

Sylvia soon realized that her soul must have other disappointments before it triumphed over the deadly narrowness that life in her body had imposed on it. Some things seemed a little horrid in her inexperience. That evening in the gypsy restaurant, run by the coarse-featured, heavy gypsy woman with the rough voice, had started so charmingly. The two neat young men had talked so warmly and so earnestly about so many things — about Utamaro, about Sharaku, about Hokusai, and about Yoshida and the modern revival. And all about the influence on the impressionists, and of Mary Cassatt and her doll-paintings. When they went upstairs, it had seemed so ugly, somehow, although she had read *Corydon*. And when she saw the stencils later, her pleasure was spoiled by thinking of the two young men.

If there were problems of the spirit, still it must be worth overcoming them, Sylvia decided. She was so inexperienced as a disembodied spirit, though. Sometimes for a while she rested gratefully in her body. There was an earthy pleasantness in walking in the fresh air, about the little campus she understood so well. From here the spire of the chapel looked tall, and the administration building imposing. The president was the president, remote within it; the secretary, a cool acquaintance to whom she spoke. Homer's friends were graded by long experience, and some were almost likable, preoccupied with worldly affairs as they were. There was a certain comfort in knowing and understanding, even if the things known were scarcely worth the understanding.

But her baby became distracting, and Homer and his eternal work became annoying. Then her spirit grew doubly scornful of these earthbound creatures. Then she savored her power, which gave her all the world to choose from. Choose she did. All over the country, in Europe and Asia, there was something that was part of her to be seen. And if war had made Europe and Asia terrifying and ugly, why, still in New York there were authors, painters, composers, pictures, books, places, music — and a bit of each was a part of her, a part of her soul. But how puzzling the whole of them was. The talk, the music, the pictures were so hard to understand. There was the famous scientist (stochastics, wasn't it?) who had been written up in *Life*. Why, when he entered the lecture room late, did he whisper to the man next to him, as he sat down, "Has he mentioned me yet?"

Resolutely, Sylvia pursued her dreams through the trying hours of spring and summer, returning only when her spirit became so confused that it seemed about to fly apart into its component pieces. And with fall, she spent still more time in her bodiless wanderings.

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For Homer was more distracted, more difficult. Apparatus was so expensive and so hard to get. Apparently the household budget had been cut for this reason. Homer appeared to think that he was on the verge of completing his work, or at least a part of it. And just then, too, Homer had been asked to teach — for a Naval training program, or some such. Homer refused because he thought that his work was more important. Because of it all, he was afraid that he would be drafted, that he would have to leave. And he stayed late at nights at the laboratory, among his smelly animals, improvising apparatus and hurrying to finish. Sylvia was indignantly surprised on rushing back to her body one evening to find it at Homer's laboratory, carrying the baby and bringing him supper. She caught the body in the middle of a sentence that she couldn't complete, and she left immediately, coming back only when the body was finally in bed and Homer still working.

With Homer's upset state of mind and with the cut in the household budget, Sylvia could hardly bear to spend time in her body. Worse, she discovered the body was pregnant again, and Homer added such a harried solicitude to his distracted behavior that Sylvia could not bear him. She came to her body chiefly when it was sleeping and she left it after the first pleasures of awakening, to return to New York and real people.

It had become pleasant to float through literary cocktail parties and to hear the dignified authors, a little high, make back-biting remarks about their publishers and their contemporaries. These at least were fairly clear, and hearing them Sylvia's spirit needed no exhilaration of alcohol. As she became more knowing, she fed her soul on the breath of scandal and on others' troubles.

When finally Homer was to be drafted, to be made to leave his precious work, Sylvia began in her soul to enjoy Homer's troubles, too. For the first time an element of humor in the situation struck her. Here was poor stupid Homer, living in frenzied haste, trying to finish his now nearly completed experiments as if his life depended on it. And it wasn't as if only she, Sylvia, had no use for it. He was doing something for which the dull and practical world, his world, after all, had no use whatsoever. In that world, sensible psychologists wore the oak leaves or eagles of the Army. Homer, clinging to his own way, was the truly superfluous man.

In her new-found amusement, Sylvia followed the last mad two weeks at the college from without, inhabiting her body during the night only, and hovering back and forth, sharing observation between it and Homer during the day. Apparently the body had been drawn into the insanity of Homer's being, for it typed and cataloged while he wrote, overexerting itself as much as he did. And late on the last night of this frenzy, long after the usual bed-

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time, when Sylvia knew she should for safety be back in her body, she still hovered about the pair to observe the climax of this effort. Amused and interested in the sordid little comedy, she resisted the pull to go elsewhere — to the hundreds of interesting places where she belonged. Here the last act was being played out. The world had been too much for Homer. Time had run out and he had not finished. Homer, a grown man, stood there and talked to her body and wept.

Sylvia could see that her body was crying, too, as it embraced Homer. Apparently it was more skilled than she had thought. Or had it been — holding out on her? Or learning things? Was there, perhaps, a sort of animal spirit, a devil soul, a thing of evil? She would put a stop to this!

And then Sylvia found that she couldn't get into her body. She just couldn't. Something was keeping her out. And she knew that she must. It was time, and more than time. She was dizzy now, and exhilarated and chilled all at once. It was as if a wind were blowing through a scrapbook, tearing at the clippings and scattering them abroad.

But her body had tricked her. Her body was keeping her out. In its poor way it must have learned to want the dull life which it shared with Homer, must want it so much as to exclude even herself, her soul.

She didn't want that life. She wanted all that was good and bright and gay in all the lives in the world. She didn't want life with Homer at all. But she knew now that she must have the body or soon she would be torn away — to what? To where her soul had come from? But where was that? Confusedly, she thought of scraps of conversations and books, of bits of plays and people. There was no time to think. She must get back into her body.

But she couldn't. The body had learned. Had it perhaps been taught? Could that dull psychologist Homer have taught her body to want to share his life and to believe that it could, all without knowing that her soul was all the time far away? Or — had Homer known about her soul, even? Had gentle, simple Homer conspired against her soul?

But she must get back. She must get back into her body in order to live — to live in any way. And she struggled desperately, dully regarding the scene between Homer and the body.

Homer seemed to have forgotten his lost work now, and his lost life, and he seemed unafraid of the imminence of the new life he faced. And the body which was to lose him no longer wept, nor did he. Now they talked and comforted one another; but strain as she would, Sylvia could not catch what they were saying. They seemed very remote. But as Homer clasped the body to him its face looked directly over his shoulder. It stared right at Sylvia's struggling soul, surely seeing it. And the lips moved.

"I can get along without you," the body said.

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Fantasies turn up from the most diverse sources: we've published stories by a biographer and bibliographer, by a satiric poet, by a philologist, by assorted physical scientists and technicians, and by unnumbered mystery novelists and creators of realistic fiction. But this is the first we've seen from a man who is by profession a writer of fact-crime and a leading contributor to most of the true-detective markets. It may be this habit of dealing in fact that enables him to take so matter-of-fact a view of cosmic and literally earth-shaking events; at any rate, we nominate this as one of the most delightfully dead-pan flights of imagination on record.

The 8:29

by EDWARD S. SULLIVAN

GEORGE WIMPLE probably could not have explained just why he didn't take the 8:17 that morning. He was feeling vaguely out of sorts. He faced an equivocal day at the office, and Mrs. Wimple had spoken again of having the house painted, and the toast had been burned.

Little things summed up to rebellion. George grimaced inwardly at the thought of facing Bill Bullock on the train. He had submitted meekly to the ritual every morning for years, but somehow today the prospect made him wince. Big Bill would greet him with a coarse guffaw as usual:

"Good old George! The little man you can always count on! Never missed the 8:17 a day in his life. You don't need a clock when George's around!"

And as George tried to immerse himself in his newspaper, Bullock would continue to pester him, to the amusement of the same daily gallery:

"Wonder what would happen if you ever missed the 8:17, Georgie? Why don't you find out someday? Do you suppose the world would come to an end?"

As a matter of fact, George Wimple quite literally had no idea what would happen if he missed the 8:17. For some fifteen years it had been a purely hypothetical question, and abstract speculation had no part in George's mental life. The proposition that he might not take the 8:17 had simply never occurred to him — until that morning, just as the 8:17 pulled in.

And then it took no conscious decision at all; it was entirely a matter of impulse. George just gripped his newspaper a little tighter as he sat on the bench, and buried his nose deeper in it, till the train was on its way again.

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Only then did he allow himself a deep breath and a covert glance around. Somehow the station didn't look quite the same. It took on a subtle aura of strangeness as the clock crept past 8:17.

But, after an initial tingle of reaction, George felt no special excitement, curiosity, relief or guilt. His mind was merely open. He was aware that he had deliberately stepped into a world unknown to him; and having done so, he was quite prepared not to be surprised at anything that might happen.

He walked over to the bulletin board. There was another train at 8:29. George had never known this, had never had occasion to know it.

He had time for a slow stroll up and down the platform, wiping his glasses and mildly taking in the curiously magic sights and sounds, before the strange train came.

It was essentially the same as the 8:17, and yet somehow different.

The people in the car had an elusive air of the exotic, the daring. George could not have put this exact quality into words, but he felt it as he took a seat next to a young woman in a sable coat.

A musky fragrance assailed him as he unfolded his paper. Scanning the headlines, he felt the woman's eyes upon him.

When she nudged him unmistakably with a silken knee, George blinked and looked up from his paper. His hand moved automatically to his hat. But the woman had turned away from him. She was gazing fixedly straight ahead. George had a blurred impression of carmine lips, olive skin, violet eyes.

Then he was aware that she was speaking to him, her lips barely moving.

"Don't look at me! Keep on reading your paper."

George blinked once more, and dutifully turned back to the headlines.

"They're watching me!" the woman went on in the same urgent whisper. "I haven't a chance. But you can get through. They don't know you. I'll distract them as we pull into the next station. Get off there and go to the man in green. Tell him: *Kismet*. You'll be safe in his hands. Go where he takes you and deliver this paper. Here."

George felt her slip a paper into his coat pocket.

The train was slowing for the station. The woman tensed and drew in her breath. Then she half rose, gave a shattering scream, collapsed across George's lap and tumbled to the aisle.

As men pushed and shouted, George sat perfectly still for a moment. The faintest trace of puzzlement crossed his face. But only for a moment. Then it cleared, and he slipped quietly from his seat, pressed past the jam in the aisle, and walked rapidly out of the car and off the train, without looking back.

A tall swarthy chauffeur in green livery stood by a tubular black limousine. He came to attention as George approached him.

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"Kismet," George told him matter-of-factly.

The man saluted, held the door open and helped George in.

The car surged off as George settled back in the cushions. He was alone. He took from his side-pocket the document the woman had passed to him, and examined it with mild interest. It was a thin brown envelope, addressed in what appeared to be some Oriental script, with a cryptic seal embossed in metallic green wax. George studied it for a moment, then carefully transferred it to his inner pocket.

Without diminishing speed, the car left the highway and turned into a small level tree-lined field where a strange silver craft, shaped like a porpoise, glinted in the sun. The chauffeur drove straight up to it.

The ship had neither wings nor visible motors, and George's first impression was that it was incomplete. But as he stepped out of the car and the silent driver took his elbow and urged him toward the queer craft, he felt rather than heard the air all a-tremble with vibrating power.

Another swarthy man in the same green uniform saluted and took his other arm. George noted that the pair moved with an odd sluggish grace, a sort of liquid economy of effort, as they swung him off the ground into the ship's silver belly and slammed the door behind him.

George found himself alone in a well-appointed cabin. Before he could settle in his seat, there was a rushing as of great wings and he was thrown off balance for a fraction of a second. But by the time he was fully seated the cabin was utterly still, as though suspended in space, in tomb-like silence.

George looked out the window and blinked when he saw an expanse of wrinkled ocean, dotted with cottony clouds, far below.

The sky swiftly purpled. There was a flash of blood-orange sunset, then night, swimming with stars. The cabin was soundlessly flooded with soft violet light.

George sat back and opened his newspaper.

He was barely into the headlines again when he felt himself dragged down in the cushioned seat as though by a great magnet; the newspaper, and his hands with it, plopped down in his lap, where they lay like lead.

Vaguely disturbed, he tried to look out the window again. But the pane now showed nothing but cavernous blackness, relieved by a suggestion of distant glimmers that came and went like faint heliograph flashes.

As quickly as it had come, the magnet-pull ceased. George sat up tentatively. He lifted his paper once more, wriggled slightly to adjust himself.

Puzzlement returned fleetingly when he noted, happening to glance down, that he was wriggling not in the seat but in mid-air. Still in his sitting position, he appeared to be hanging — or, more exactly, gently afloat — between seat and ceiling.

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George blinked with a touch of preoccupation at the curved ceiling, at the black window-square. He blinked twice before he turned back to his paper, grasping it a little more firmly, and concentrated again on the headlines.

He had hardly begun to read before he was aware that he was subsiding gradually back into the seat. It was as though the cushion rose to meet him.

The ship shuddered slightly; George looked up; the door flew open.

The dark chauffeur, standing in the glare of floodlights, beckoned to him urgently. George put his paper away and stepped gingerly down, holding his hat. He seemed to bounce as he touched the ground, and would have fallen, but hands gripped his elbows and held him erect.

Blinking in the brilliance, he let himself be guided to still another conveyance, a sort of squashed automobile on two wheels. It shot off immediately. In the rush of darkness George could not see his surroundings, but from the twisting angles the car took he gathered that it was climbing a steep mountain.

They stopped under a battlemented crest. Through a flare of violet searchlights the driver led George to where a huge bearded man in green robes and turban stood in the midst of a silent group, gazing out over a starlit valley.

George was no astronomer, but he knew at one blink that the star-pattern was not the one familiar to him. He had little time to look, for his guide nudged him forward.

Green fire flashed from a carved emerald ring as the giant, lost in contemplation, fingered his beard.

The green-clad escort respectfully tapped the pocket where George had put the sealed envelope, and pointed to the bearded man.

George stepped forward, taking the envelope from his pocket. The bystanders exclaimed at sight of the green seals.

The big man was not yet aware of the newcomers.

George cleared his throat politely. Finally the man turned, frowned unseeingly at him. Instinctively George tipped his hat.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, "but I believe this is for you."

The giant's eyes focused back to reality. He snatched the envelope from George's hand, ripped it open.

A storm of emotions swept his face as he devoured its contents. Then he held out the papers to an aide and rattled sharp orders in a strange tongue. The messenger saluted and rushed off.

The bearded one vented a huge sigh as he looked out over the valley again. Then he turned to George and put a bear-like arm around him. He addressed him in English:

"Do you realize what you've done, Mr. — er —?"

"Wimple. George Wimple."

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"Mr. Wimple, You've saved my planet. You've saved your own earth. It's possible that you've saved the entire solar system! You see that mountain over there?"

George blinked at the vast white hill across the valley, that loomed elephantine in the starlight. It glimmered with a queer iridescent sheen.

"That's a mountain of pure uranium," the giant went on. "The enemy has been bombarding it with neutron-rays, from one of our satellites. Fission has already started, and in a few hours a chain reaction would have set in, right down to the bowels of the planet, and we would have been blown apart!"

George contemplated the shining mountain with polite curiosity.

"Not only that, but the explosion would have altered the frequency of the cosmic rays reaching your own world, and it, too, would have been destroyed in a flash! The enemy, in his impervious Q-tanks, would have been master of the universe!

"This document you've brought me is the stolen formula for the quantum-ray — the only thing that can stop the neutrons. Within the hour my men will be pelting the mountain with quanta, and it will be rendered as harmless as a child's sand-pile!"

While George sought for fitting words, the giant propelled him back to the car and they were whirled down the mountainside.

They passed through a walled city where trumpet-calls filled the air, and stopped beside broad steps lined by files of green soldiers.

Though he moved his legs normally, George tended to bounce up several steps at a time; but the bearded one took his arm and held him at his side.

As they ascended, George glimpsed massive walls and towers of jade. They entered a banquet hall. Slaves were piling a brocaded dais with trays of food. Dancing-girls, clad in strings of emeralds, slipped from behind a curtain. George tipped his hat.

The ursine arm descended on his shoulder again.

"It's all yours, Mr. — er — Wimple! Nothing's too good for you. Just name what you want!"

The golden flesh of the dancers stirred to the pulse of hidden flutes.

George stole a glance at his wrist-watch.

When there was a pause in the music, he said diffidently:

"I appreciate all this, Mr. — er — but I think I'd better be going now, if you don't need me any more."

His host bowed his head.

"As you wish. But be pleased to accept this token." He took off the emerald signet-ring, slipped it on George's finger. "It will be your passport and talisman. Your wish is my grateful planet's command, as long as you may live!"

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He clapped his hands and two men in green appeared and took George gently by the arms, guided him out of the room and down the steps. Amid trumpet-blasts, the strange two-wheeled car whisked him back to the flood-lighted field.

The porpoise-craft spurted through space in suspended silence, while George floated in mid-cabin as though in an invisible swing. The red bar of sunset was crossed, and a moment later George stepped out into lengthening afternoon shadows. The green-liveried chauffeur, moving with sluggish liquidity, led him to the bullet-limousine.

The car whistled through treed lanes, melted to a stop at the corner near George's home. The man in green helped him out; as George turned to thank him, he had slipped behind the wheel again and the car was disappearing down the street.

George stared after it for a moment, lost in thought. Then he looked at the emerald ring with its hieroglyphs.

There was a storm-drain on the corner. With a glance around to make sure he was unobserved, George dropped the ring down the drain. Then he walked unhurriedly home.

"You're early, George," Mrs. Wimple greeted him. "Dinner isn't nearly ready."

"That's all right," George said. "I'll read the paper."

The next morning, George made the 8:17 with several minutes to spare. Bill Bullock was in rare spirits.

"Well, well!" he guffawed. "You weren't with us yesterday, Georgie! So you finally missed the 8:17! And you see, the world didn't come to an end after all!"

George Wimple permitted himself a thin smile as he unfolded his morning paper.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946

of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, published bimonthly at Concord, New Hampshire, for Oct. 1, 1951

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *Editors*, Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif.; *Managing Editor*, Robert P. Mills, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *General Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. 2. The owners are: Fantasy House, Inc., 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Jonathan M. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. (Signed) J. W. Ferman, *General Manager*. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 10th day of September, 1951. [Seal] Ethel S. Aldinger, *Notary Public*. (My commission expires March 30, 1952.)

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Under any of his numerous names, John Wyndham is a writer as versatile as he is attractive. THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS, *easily one of the best products of the current boom in hard-cover science fiction, is a logical and terrifying study in future history.* Bargain from Brunswick (*F&SF, June, 1951*) *is a tender and touching modern fairy tale. And* Jizzle *is purely unclassifiable. It belongs in the great tradition of off-beat, ironic English short stories, the tradition of "Saki" and John Collier. It's a delight to bring you this bright treatment of a new concept, which appeared in an abbreviated version in "Collier's" for January 8, 1949, as by John Beynon.*

Jizzle

by JOHN WYNDHAM

THE FIRST THING that Ted Torby saw, when his reluctant eyelids had gathered enough strength to raise themselves, seemed to be a monkey, perched on the top of the cupboard, watching him. He sat bolt upright with a jerk that joggled Rosie awake and shook the whole trailer.

"Oh, God!" he said. It was a tone which held more of depressed realization than surprise.

He closed his eyes, and then looked again, hard. The monkey was still there, staring from round, dark eyes.

"What's the matter?" Rosie asked sleepily. Then she saw the direction of his gaze. "Oh, that! Serves you right."

"It's real?" said Ted.

"Of course it's real. And lie down. You've pulled all the bedclothes off me."

Ted leant back, keeping his eyes fixed warily on the monkey. Slowly, and hindered by a painful throbbing in his head, memories of the evening began to reassemble.

"I'd forgotten," he said.

"I don't wonder — seeing the way you came home," said Rosie, dispassionately. "I expect you've got a lovely head," she added, with a slightly sadistic shading.

Ted did not answer. He was remembering about the monkey.

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"How much did you give for that?" asked Rosie, nodding at it.

"Couple o' quid," said Ted.

"Two good pounds for *that*," she said with disgust. "And you call your customers mugs!"

Ted made no response. In point of fact, it had been ten pounds, but he did not feel equal to meeting the storm that the admission would arouse. And he'd beaten the man down from fifteen, so it was a bargain. A big Negro he was, speaking a nautical form of English heavily adulterated with some kind of French. He had made his brief entry into Ted's life while the latter was in *The Gate & Goat* soothing his hard-worked throat after the evening's work. Ted had not been greatly interested. He had, in his time, refused to buy all manner of things in bars from bootlaces to ferrets. But the Negro had been quietly persistent. Somehow he had got himself into the position of standing Ted a drink, and after that he had the advantage. Ted's protests that he had nothing to do with the circus proper, and that he was utterly indifferent to its fauna, save for such rats as occasionally ventured into the trailer, made no impression at all. The man's conviction that every person connected with the showground must have an encyclopedic knowledge of the whole brute creation was unshakable: all protestation was merely a form of sales resistance. He had then proceeded to talk with such animation across several relays of drinks of the attainments and charming qualities of something he referred to as *ma petite Giselle* that Ted had found it necessary to remind himself from time to time that the subject had not shifted beneath their tongues, and it was still a monkey that was under discussion.

In a way, it was hard luck on the Negro that he should have chosen Ted for his approach, since Ted himself had been spending the earlier part of the evening in persuading the reluctant to part with half-crowns of known qualities in exchange for bottles of merely hypothetical virtue. But Ted was not mean-minded. He followed the technique with the attention of a connoisseur, and was prepared to concede that the Negro wasn't doing too badly, for an amateur. Nevertheless, it was scarcely to be expected that even the utmost perfervour and intensity could win more than his detached, and unprofitable, professional approval. Rosie's crack about mugs had more spite than substance. The matter should have ended there, with the Negro butting at the immovable. Indeed, there it would have ended had not the Negro added a new accomplishment to the list of his Giselle's remarkable qualities.

Ted had smiled. Sooner or later, the amateur always over-reaches himself. It was safe enough to say that the creature was clean, attractive, intelligent, for these qualities are conveniently relative. It was not dangerous even to

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say that it was "educated" — there being no public examination to set a standard of simian learning. But in making a definite claim which could be put to the test, the Negro's inexperience was laying him wide open to trouble. At that point Ted had agreed to go to see the prodigy. The concession was almost altruistic: he did not believe a word of it, but neither did he mean trouble. He was the man of experience showing the promising beginner the kind of trouble he *might* have landed himself in by a simple divergence from the debatable to the disprovable.

It had been quite a shock, therefore, to find that the monkey was fully up to specification.

Ted had watched it, first patronisingly, then incredulously, and finally with an excitement which it required all his skill in deadpanning to disguise. Casually he offered five pounds. The Negro asked the ludicrous sum of fifteen. Ted would willingly have given fifty had it been necessary. In the end they compromised on ten and a bottle of whisky that Ted had intended to take home. There had been one or two drinks from the bottle to clinch the deal. After that, nothing was very clear, but evidently he had got back somehow — and with the monkey.

"It's got fleas," said Rosie, wrinkling her nose.

"It's a female," said Ted. "And monkeys don't have fleas. They just do that."

"Well, if it isn't looking for fleas, what is it doing?"

"I read somewhere that it's something to do with perspiration — anyway, they all do it."

"I can't see that that's much better," said Rosie.

The monkey broke away from its interests for a moment, and looked seriously at both of them. Then it gave a kind of snickering noise.

"What's it do that for?" Rosie asked.

"How would I know? — They just do."

Ted lay and contemplated the monkey for a while. It was predominantly light brown, shot with occasional silver. Its limbs and tail seemed curiously long for its body. From a black wrinkled face in a round, low-browed head two large eyes, looking like black glass marbles with sorrowful depths, scrutinized first one and then the other with such directness that one almost expected it to produce some sign of opinion. However, it merely returned to its own interests with an indifference which was in itself vaguely offensive.

Rosie continued to regard it without favour.

"Where are you going to keep it? I'm not going to have it in here."

"Why not?" asked Ted. "She's quite clean."

"How do you know? You were tight when you bought it."

"I got tight *after* I'd bought her. And don't keep on calling her *it*. She's a

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her. You get annoyed with me when I call a baby *it*, and it's probably a lot more important to monkeys than it is to babies. And her name's Jizzle."

"Jizzle?" repeated Rosie.

"A French name," Ted explained.

Rosie remained unimpressed. "All the same, I don't hold with keeping her here. It's not decent."

Jizzle was at the moment in a complicated and unornamental attitude. She had disposed her right foot round her neck, and was absorbed in an intense study of the back of her right knee.

"She's no ordinary monkey — she's educated," said Ted.

"Educated she may be, but she's not refined. Look at her now."

"What —? Oh, well, monkeys, you know —" Ted said vaguely. "But I'll show you how educated she is. Worth a fortune. You watch."

There could be no doubt whatever: one demonstration was enough to convince the most prejudiced that Jizzle was a gold mine.

"I wonder why he sold it — her?" said Rosie. "He could have made a fortune."

"I guess he just wasn't a showman — or a businessman," Ted added.

After breakfast he went out of the trailer and looked at his stand. It had an inscription across the front: —

DR. STEVEN'S
PSYCHOLOGICAL STIMULATOR

About the rostrum boldly lettered posters asked: —

IS HESITATION HINDERING YOUR CAREER?

IS YOUR MIND A FLIP-FLAP?

or stated: —

A STEADY MIND IS A READY MIND

PLANNED THINKING PAYS

SNAP BEATS FLAP

and advised: —

DIRECT YOUR OWN DESTINY

MOBILIZE MENTALLY AND MAKE MONEY

PLAN YOUR PROSPERITY

For the first time the array failed to please him. Also for the first time he was astonished to think of the number of half-crowns it had helped to draw

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in exchange for the omnipotent Famous World-Unique Mental Tonic.

"May as well ditch this lot," he said. "We'll need a tent with benches and a stage."

Then he went back to the trailer, and turned Rosie out.

"I got to think," he explained. "I got to work out the patter and the publicity, and we'll get you a new dress for the act."

The tryout took place a couple of days later before a critical audience drawn from the profession. It included Joe Dindell, more widely known as El Magnifico of Magnifico and His Twenty Man-Eating Lions, Dolly Brag or Gipsy Clara, George Haythorpe from the Rifle-Range, Pearl Verity (nee Jedd), the Only Authentic Three-Legged Woman in the World, and a sprinkling of others from both the main and side shows.

The tent was not as large as Ted would have liked, and incapable of seating more than sixty persons, but better things would come. Meanwhile, he made his appearance before the curtain and delivered the build-up as though he addressed the rising tiers in a super-cinema. It was in the approved style of superlative, and when it ended with the phrase: "— and now, Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you the greatest — the unbelievable — the supreme wonder of the animal world — JIZZLE!" the applause had a quality of discriminating appreciation.

As Ted concluded he had moved to the left. Now, as the curtains drew away, he turned, left hand extended towards the centre of the stage. Rosie, having hurriedly fixed the curtain, tripped a few steps on from the other side, stopped with her knees bent in a species of curtsy, projected charm at the audience, and extended her right hand to the centre of the stage. Between them stood an easel bearing a large pad of white paper and beside it, on a square table with a red fringed top, sat Jizzle. She was clad in a bright yellow dress, and a pill-box hat with a curled red feather: for the moment she had pulled the dress aside, and was searching beneath it with great application.

Both Ted's smile and Rosie's were property affairs which could have deceived no one. A few minutes earlier she had flatly and finally declined to wear the new dress he had designed for her.

"I don't care," she said. "I've told you I won't, and I won't. You can dress your beastly monkey how you like, but you won't make me dress like it. I'm surprised at you asking it. Whoever heard of a man dressing his wife like a monkey?"

It was in vain that Ted protested she had it the wrong way round. Rosie's mind was made up. She would appear in the costume in which she was accustomed to hand out bottles of the Psychological Stimulator, or not at all.

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To Ted's mind it pettily ruined his whole carefully planned effect. It was unfortunate that her brown hair was of much the same shade as the dominant colour of Jizzle's fur, but merely a coincidence.

Ted, after a few more high commendations of his protégée, moved over to the easel and stood beside it, facing the house. Rosie advanced, shifted the table with Jizzle upon it in front of the easel, and handed something to the monkey. Almost before she was able to bob and beam and resume her place, Jizzle was on her feet with her left hand holding on to the side of the pad, her right hand drawing swiftly. An astonished muttering broke out among the spectators. Her technique would not have met with approval in art-schools, and it gave a certain simian flavour, hitherto unnoticed in her subject by others, but the final likeness to Ted was indisputable. Sheer amazement made the applause a trifle slow in starting, but when it came it was wholehearted.

Ted tore off the sheet and moved away, graciously waving Rosie into his place. She took it with a smile that was resolutely fixed. Ted pinned his picture to the back of the stage while Jizzle drew again. Once more the likeness was remarkable, though perhaps the simian quality was a shade more to the fore. Ted felt that from the domestic angle it was possibly just as well after all that Rosie had not worn the dress. Even so, the audience's laugh put Rosie's professional expression to a test which it only just survived.

"Now, if any lady or gentleman in the audience —?" suggested Ted.

Joe Dindell was the first to oblige. Powerful and massive, he stalked onto the stage to take up one of his best El Magnifico poses beside the easel.

Ted continued to try out his patter while Jizzle drew. She needed no persuasion. The moment one sheet was torn off she started on the next as if the plain paper were an irresistible invitation to doodle between clients. Once or twice Ted let her finish, making it clear that she was able to repeat from memory as well as draw from direct observation. By the end of the show the stage was decorated with portraits of the whole of the small audience who were clustered round, wringing Ted's hand, predicting overwhelming success, and inspecting Jizzle as if they were even yet not quite convinced of what they had seen. The only person who held a little aloof in the celebration which followed was Rosie. She sat sipping her drink and speaking little. From time to time she turned a gloomy, speculative look on the self-occupied Jizzle.

Rosie found it difficult to be clear in her own mind whether she disliked Jizzle because she was unnatural, or because she was too natural. Both were, in her view, sound bases for distaste. Jizzle was abnormal, a freak, and it was natural to feel that way about a freak — except, of course, those like Pearl

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whom one knew well. On the other hand, certain franknesses which would have been unperturbing in a dog, became embarrassing when displayed by a creature, and particularly a female creature, which providence had privileged to be at least a kind of burlesque of the form divine. There was also Jizzle's attitude. It was true that monkeys often snickered: it was true that by the law of averages some of these snickers must be ill-timed — but still . . .

All the same, Jizzle became the third occupant of the trailer.

"She's going to be worth thousands of pounds to us — and that means she's worth thousands to others, too," Ted pointed out. "We can't risk having her pinched. And we can't risk her getting ill, either. Monkeys need warm places to live in." Which was all quite true; and so Jizzle stayed.

From the first performance of the act, there was not an instant's doubt of its success. Ted raised the admission from one shilling to one-and-six, and then to two shillings, and the price of a Jizzle "original" from half-a-crown to five shillings without any loss of patronage. He opened negotiations for a larger tent.

Rosie tolerated her position as handmaiden for just one week, and then struck. The audience laughed at each of Jizzle's drawings, but Rosie's sensitive ear detected a different note when they saw the portrait of her. It rankled.

"It — she makes me look more monkey-like every time. I believe she does it on purpose," she said. "I won't stand there and be made a fool of by a monkey."

"Darling, that's sheer imagination. All her drawing is a bit monkeyish — after all, it's only natural," Ted remonstrated.

"It's more so when it's me."

"Now, do be reasonable, darling. What would it matter anyway, even if it were so?"

"So you don't mind your wife being jeered at by a monkey?"

"But that's ridiculous, Rosie. You'll get used to her. She's a nice friendly little thing, really."

"She isn't, not to me. She keeps on watching and spying on me all the time."

"Come now, darling, hang it all —"

"I don't care what you say, she does. She just sits there watching and snickering. I suppose she's got to live in the trailer; I'll have to put up with that, but I've had enough of her in the act. You can do it without me. If you must have someone, get Ireen from the Hoop-La. *She* won't mind."

Ted was genuinely distressed, and more at the troubled state of the larger partnership than the breaking up of the act. It was indisputable that some-

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thing had happened and kept on happening to it since Jizzle's arrival. It took the gilt off a lot of things. He and Rosie had always got along so well together. He had wanted her to have more pleasures and comforts than the returns from Dr. Steven's Stimulator could provide; and now that the big chance had come, discord had arrived with it. No one acquiring such a valuable property as Jizzle could afford not to exploit her properly. Rosie was perfectly well aware of that — but, well, women got such queer fixed ideas . . . Upon that, he had an idea himself. He made a discreet search to discover if Rosie had been sewing any small garments in secret — apparently she had not.

Business thrived. Ted's show was promoted to mention on the advance bills. Jizzle also thrived, and settled in. She took to Ted's left shoulder as her favourite perch, which was somehow slightly flattering, and also had publicity value, but domestically things went the other way. Little was to be seen of Rosie during the day. She seemed always to be helping or drinking cups of tea in some other caravan. If Ted had to go out on business he had to shut Jizzle up in the trailer alone when he felt that both her safety and well-being demanded someone to look after her. But his single suggestion that Rosie might act as guardian had met with so quiet yet determined a rebuff that he did not like to repeat it. At night Rosie did her best to ignore Jizzle altogether; the monkey responded with sulky moods which broke on occasion into snickers. At such times Rosie would relinquish indifference, and glare at her angrily. She gave it as her opinion that even the lions were more companionable creatures. But Rosie herself was far less companionable than before. Ted was aware of an uninterest and grudgingness in her that had never been there before, and he was puzzled: the money that now rolled in was by no means everything . . .

Had he not been a reasonable, clear-thinking man, he might have begun to feel some resentment against Jizzle, himself. . . .

The puzzle was to a great extent resolved on a night when Jizzle had already been an established success for six weeks. Ted came back to the trailer later than usual. He had had several drinks, but he was not drunk. He walked into the trailer with a sheet of paper rolled in his hand, and stood looking down at Rosie, who was already in bed.

"You ——!" he said. He leaned over and smacked her face hard.

Rosie, startled out of a half-sleep, was as much bewildered as hurt. Ted glared down at her.

"Now I understand quite a lot. Spying on you, you said. God, what a mug I've been! No wonder you didn't want her around."

"What are you talking about?" Rosie demanded, tears in her eyes.

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"You know. I expect everyone knows but me."

"But, Ted —"

"You can save your breath. Look at this!"

He unrolled the sheet of paper before her. Rosie stared at it. It was surprising how much obscene suggestion could reside in a few simple lines.

"While I was doing the patter," Ted said. "All sniggering their bloody heads off before I saw what was happening. Damn funny, isn't it?" He looked down at the drawing. There could not be a moment's doubt for any who knew them that the woman and man involved were Rosie and El Magnifico. . . .

Rosie flushed to her hair. She jumped from the bed and made a vicious grab at the top of the cupboard. Jizzle evaded her skilfully.

Ted caught her arm and jerked her back.

"It's too late for that now," he said.

The flush had gone, leaving her face white.

"Ted," she said. "You don't believe . . . ?"

"Spying on you!" he repeated.

"But, Ted, I didn't mean . . ."

He slapped her again across the face.

Rosie caught her breath; her eyes narrowed.

"Damn you! *Damn you!*" she said, and went for him like a fury.

Ted reached one hand behind him and unlatched the door. He turned round with her, and thrust her outside. She stumbled down the three steps, tripped on the hem of her nightdress, and fell to the ground.

He slammed the door shut, and snapped the bolt.

Up on the cupboard Jizzle snickered. Ted threw a saucepan at her. She dodged it, and snickered again.

The next morning an air of concern spread outwards from the office where the manager and the ringmaster were considering the problem of finding at short notice a man of presence and intrepid appearance to take charge of the lion act. Quite half the day passed before anyone but Ted knew that Rosie also was missing.

Ted went through the next few days with remorse putting increasing pressure on righteous anger. He had not realized what Rosie's absence would mean. He had done, as he saw it, the only thing a man could do in the circumstances — but very bitterly was he aware of the craven wish that he had never learnt the circumstances.

Jizzle's confident predilection for his shoulder as a perch became a source of irritation. He took to pushing her off impatiently. But for the damned monkey he never need have known about Rosie . . . He began to hate the sight of Jizzle. . . .

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For a week he continued to give the show, mechanically, but with increasing distaste; then he approached George Haythorpe of the Rifle-Range. George reckoned it could be done. Muriel, his wife, could easily manage the Range with a girl to help her; he himself was willing to take over Jizzle and run the act with Ted retaining a 20% interest in the gross.

"That is," George added, "if the monkey'll stand for it. She seems mighty attached to you."

For a day or two that appeared to be the most doubtful aspect of the arrangement. Jizzle continued to attach herself to Ted, and to watch him rather than George for instructions. But gradually, by patient and repeated removal, the change in mastery was made plain to her, whereupon she sulked for two days before deciding to accept it.

It was a relief to be free of Jizzle — but it did not bring back Rosie. The trailer seemed emptier than ever . . . After a few days of morbid inactivity Ted took himself in hand. He pulled out his old stock, unrolled some of the old bills for the Psychological Stimulator and lettered some new ones: —

MODERNIZE YOUR MENTALITY
CONFIDENCE CREATES CASH
A KEEN MIND IS A KEY MIND

In a short while he was back at the old stand and the mugs were putting up their half-crowns with a will — but it wasn't quite the same without Rosie handing out the bottles. . . .

Jizzle had now settled in well with George. The act was on its feet again and playing to capacity, but Ted felt no tinge of jealousy or regret as he watched the crowds going in. Even his share of the takings brought him little pleasure; they still linked him with Jizzle. He would have given them all up on the spot just to have Rosie beside him again as he shouted the merits of his elixir. He began to try to trace her, but without success. . . .

A month passed before a night on which Ted was awakened by a knock on the trailer door. His heart thumped. Even at that moment he had been dreaming of Rosie. He jumped out of bed to open the door.

But it was not Rosie. It was George, with Jizzle on his shoulder and one of the Range rifles in his hand.

"What —?" began Ted dazedly. He had been so sure it was Rosie.

"I'll show you what, you bastard," said George. "Just look at that!"

He brought forward his other hand with a sheet of paper in it.

Ted looked. Compromising would have been the severest understatement for the attitude in which George's wife, Muriel, was displayed with Ted.

He raised his horrified eyes. . . .

George was lifting the rifle. On his shoulder Jizzle snickered.

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Your editors feel that they are being impartial, despite their own Irish blood, in saying that hardly any nation has produced a folklore comparable to the Irish in richness of incident and character, in breadth of tragedy and comedy, in depth of symbolism and directness of realism. Modern retellings of the great legends are innumerable, and many of them admirable; but we've found few story-tellers so precisely to our taste as the Welsh-born Irishman (now a California librarian) W. B. Ready, who shuns poetic embellishments and scholarly reconstructions and proceeds to tell the ancient stories to the men and children of our time simply and in their own language. And occasionally, as in this revelation of the activities in America of the giant Finn MacCool, he adds details which you've never heard before — but which you recognize instantly as the authentic stuff of legend. This story is from THE GREAT DISCIPLE *(see this month's* Recommended Reading*); we'll soon be bringing you more of Ready, both reprints and stories written expressly for F&SF.*

The Giant Finn MacCool

by W. B. READY

SOMEHOW it's only after a job is done that they find out the easy way to do it. There are steam shovels and bulldozers now, but when they were building the roads across America there were none of these things. There were only men. It was men who built the roads that went snaking westward; it was men who laid the ties and drove the spikes, and many a one of them, as he sweated and grunted and heaved, thought back with longing of the land he'd left behind him. There were lots of Irish in the railroad gangs and, big and tough as they were, they would never have achieved their high estate as princes of the pick and shovel brigade if it had not been for their champion, the creature Finn MacCool.

Finn had been helping the Irish with their problems from 'way back. When they wanted to cross over to Scotland to settle an argument he threw rocks in the sea for them to use as a causeway, and many a weary sailor has cursed Finn MacCool ever since for his well-intentioned stone-throwing. Most of the rocks are still standing up out of the ocean, and the gulls scream

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and circle above them as the ships cautiously tiptoe around the jagged, worn-down steppingstones.

Finn was never very bright, but he was willing, God help him. He was such a big man himself that he thought big, so that if a distressed Irishman called on him for help he generally got loaded down with far too much of whatever it was he had been wanting. If a tired farmer called on Finn to dig him a ditch Finn would dig one so wide and deep that the whole of the farmer's land would be shoveled under the muck that Finn threw over his shoulder in his digging, and the ditch itself would be so deep that anybody falling into it would have time to holler for Finn to come and lift him out before he hit the bottom. Finn was such a clumsy man as well as being so almighty strong. Whenever the children of Ireland were in bed, which is always good and early in that proper land, Finn would walk through Ireland as quietly as he could, and he would be so intent upon his walking that he would never notice where he was going. He stepped on Dublin Castle that way once, and the place has never been the same since. Of course, the Castle people blamed the rebel men for flattening it, and there has always been great argument as to who really was to blame. The rebel men were so pleased at being imagined so strong by the Castle people that they never owned up that on that very night they were all plotting in Dolan's bar, and Finn was so high up that he never even noticed that the Castle was looking rather lower down than usual.

For all Finn's clumsiness the Irish people have always liked him. They are rather proud of him in a way, because there are not many nations these days that have their own giant. Still and all, they were glad when he went to America, where it's so big that he's hardly noticed.

Finn had heard of America ever since St. Brendan had discovered it about a thousand years before Columbus hit the shore. St. Brendan always said that he wished that he had stayed on over there, but when he met the Indian tribe of Micmacs he thought that they were the queerest looking Irishmen that he had ever seen, so he went back to the Old Country, where he told everybody about the Micks that he had met with feathers in their hair. Finn knew about America all right, but although he stepped across once or twice he didn't like the looks of it. There was too much hustle and bustle there for Finn, who used to like to stretch out along the top of a range of hills and watch the fishing boats put in to Galway Bay. Ireland suited Finn fine, as long as there were plenty of people to talk to, but about a hundred years ago Finn noticed that there were fewer and fewer of his friends around, and that hundreds of boats were heading always for America. One day Finn saw a swank young lad hurrying on his way to Cork harbor with his bundle on his shoulder, so Finn picked him up between his thumb and forefinger and asked

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him what the score was. He had to hold the lad very close to his ear to get the answer, for to Finn a human voice was only about as loud as a bat's squeak.

"Haven't you heard, Finn, my decent fellow," said the young Irishman, "that all the young people of Ireland are off to the green fields of America? Sure the streets are paved with gold over there, and there is hardly a potato in the whole wide expanse of the country. It's meat and milk and butter that the people live on over there, and it's away from the English, so we are all for off. Put me down now, my heart of corn, or I'll be missing the boat that is straining to get away from the harbor yonder."

Finn put young Owen Downey on his feet again gently. "God bless you, Owen lad," said he, "may God be with you every foot of the way you take"; but Finn said it absent-mindedly, because he had been to America. He'd leaned over Boston anyway, and he had seen no streets paved with gold. He also thought he had seen something else, but he hadn't; he had only had a bad dream about a place that was to grow up later, called Pittsburgh. Finn thought that America was a queer place for the Irish to be wanting. They were never a very energetic people if there was any money in it, and, as far as he could see, that was the main thing about America; the people he had seen had all hustled after money. "Still," he rubbed his head, "I'm the biggest and thickest Mick that ever was or will be, so I guess I saw the wrong America."

The years went by until there were no young folk left in Ireland at all. Finn used to miss the music of the crossroads' dances, and the skirl of the pipes was now very quavering as an old man played them, or taught the skill of it to a wee lad who was waiting to go on the next boat to America. Finn liked the old folks and the children very much, but he was never like the children and he would never be like the old folk, because giants come in only one size, and they stay that way, being creatures. One fine, quiet, soft day Finn took a turn across Connemara, which was his favorite stamping ground, it being hardly settled at all, and he suddenly realized why he was feeling so restless and so lonesome. "Begad," said he, "I'll step across the water, and see how my friends are getting along over there in America."

Well, when Finn MacCool, hidden in the clouds and wearing his flying boots, hovered over America a great sadness came over him. Most of the poor Irish, not having the fare, had got no further than the Atlantic coast, and they were huddled in poor houses along there, in Boston and New York and such-like places. Finn thought that it was like landing in a lovely country and never getting beyond the grimy water front, for he could see over the Appalachians, and he could see the lovely land that lay beyond. He picked up some of the Irish in his fingers, out of Boston, and they told

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him that the streets had not been paved with gold at all, and that here they were all stuck in the big city with never a chance of getting out of it.

Finn kept them in his hand while he got to thinking. At last he said: "Well why don't they build a railroad that will open up that lovely Western land?" At that the Irish stared at him. "Is it a railroad? Why man, there are high mountains and muskeg, lakes and rivers so big that you could sink all Ireland in the middle of them and it wouldn't cause a hazard for a passing steamboat. Is it a railroad? Why, they would need supermen to build such a road."

Finn smiled at them. He put them all down except Big Mauler Donovan, and he said to him: "Mauler, go and tell the people with the money that the Irish will put the railroad through for them." Mauler gasped at that, but he saw that Finn had something on his mind, and nobody ever thought of crossing Finn, because he never did any real harm, and he was a gentle man, and decent too, underneath it all. Why, Mauler remembered the last time he had seen Finn. The big giant was baby-sitting for the village of Ballycarty, while the parents and big children had gone to Inchycooly to the circus. Finn had sat on an adjacent hill, and had watched over the town like an old hen watches her chicks. Thinking of things like that, Mauler agreed to go to the monied people. They jumped at the idea, maybe in order to try and put a railroad through or maybe, as some people have suggested, to get the Irish out of Boston.

The Irish took the picks and shovels and went to work. They were issued barrels of beer and plenty of hamburgers to keep them going, but it was slow and weary work. Finn watched them from above the clouds, and as long as the going was only average tough he stayed watching. When they came up against muskeg he would tell them to lay off for the day, and he would take about fifty shovels and squeeze and stretch them together until he got one big enough to handle. Then, looking like a big buck Irish navvy enlarged about fifty times, he would dig through that muskeg, find the bedrock, tap piles in it with the flat of his shovel, and lay the ties across, that he kept in his mouth, like bobby pins. In a day he would get the rails across the worst stretch of muskeg, and then the Irish would take over again, until they struck another bad patch.

It was when they struck a bad patch, and were resting, that they got the bad name for fighting and causing disturbances all through the West. Until now people have always wondered how they had time to tarryhoot so much when they were laying the rails at such a rate. It was just the same as the time Finn MacCool stepped on Dublin Castle. He never noticed the work, and the Irish were quite flattered to let people think that they did all the incredible labor that went into the opening up of America. Among them-

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selves the Irish have always given the credit to Finn MacCool, but it's only recently, in our time that the Irish have got around to talking with any other people except themselves.

One fine day the railroad ran all across America, although you still have to change trains at Chicago. Finn felt fairly happy about the whole thing. The Irish had settled down along the tracks. Some of them even stuck it out at St. Paul. Too many of them stayed in Boston. The Bostonians couldn't get nearly enough of them working on the railroad, and an Indian chief called Tammany had kept a lot of them in New York. Still, Finn had, by his exertions, given all America a leaven of Irish, and because he had done so well by the States he made up his mind to stay there. He has some friends among the wise people, the little creatures of Ireland, and they fixed it so that he looks just like a big Irishman to other people, although he is really as big as he ever was. Sometimes he takes a turn at being a tenor in New York, sometimes he's a cop in Dubuque, Iowa. He just ambles around, visiting his people. The Irish still see him as gigantic as ever, but they don't tell anybody. They don't want to embarrass the big fellow. The last time Mauler Donovan's grandson saw him he was holding back the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge, in the late great war. The Germans, and the other Americans, thought it was just another fighting Irishman, but, of course, it was Finn MacCool.

It's about time the Irish had another heavyweight champion of the world. The Irish have been talking about it for quite a while now. Don't be surprised if a Jerry Driscoll or a Shamus Hennessy starts mowing them down in the preliminaries soon. The only snag with the scheme, say the Irish, is that Finn might come up against another fighter with some Irish in him, and then he would refuse to fight, because the Irish lad would see Finn at his real size, and they wouldn't be able to hit one another — as if Finn would ever hit an Irishman. It's all very difficult, say the Irish, for, as everybody knows, nearly all great heavyweights, barring the colored folk, must have some Irish in them somewhere, or they would never be able to start. For all that, it's very probable that the Irish will work out some way to get Finn to put the gloves on. They weren't ashamed of letting him build the railroad for them, all except for the long easy stretches. Is there any reason to doubt at all that they won't let him win the world's championship for them? They do say that John L. Sullivan was really . . . but that's another story.

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When Harvey Breit, admirably deft interviewer for "The New York Times Book Review," printed his Talk with Mr. Bradbury *last August, much of the conversation was devoted to a short story,* The Pedestrian, *which seemed to sum up neatly the Bradbury ideas as to the horrors of a sterilely machined future. "Times" readers and others may have been wondering what became of this story; here's the answer: It did not appear in any fantasy magazine nor in any of the slicks to which Bradbury sells with such enviable regularity, but in the August 7 issue of Max Ascoli's interesting Third Force political fortnightly, "The Reporter" — a magazine which seems nearly as fascinated by Bradbury as it is by politics, since it has published not only his fiction but also (in the June 26, 1951 issue) a stimulating critical profile by Richard Donovan,* Morals from Mars, *which discerns in Bradbury a "chromium-age Thoreau." Now* The Pedestrian *appears for the first time in a fiction magazine, with the warning that its chilling premise may be less fantastic than one thinks: The city of Beverly Hills already has an ordinance against walking the streets after 10 P. M.*

The Pedestrian

by RAY BRADBURY

TO ENTER out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr. Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do. He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of sidewalk in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of A.D. 2131, or as good as alone, and with a final decision made, a path selected, he would stride off, sending patterns of frosty air before him like the smoke of a cigar.

Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard, because only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows. Sudden gray phantoms seemed to manifest themselves

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upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomblike building was still open.

Mr. Leonard Mead would pause, cock his head, listen, look, and march on, his feet making no noise on the lumpy walk. For a long while now the sidewalks had been vanishing under flowers and grass. In ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, he had never met another person walking, not one in all that time.

He now wore sneakers when strolling at night, because the dogs in intermittent squads would parallel his journey with barkings if he wore hard heels, and lights might click on and faces appear, and an entire street be startled by the passing of a lone figure in the early November evening.

On this particular evening he began his journey in a westerly direction, toward the hidden sea. There was a good crystal frost in the air; it cut the nose going in and made the lungs blaze like a Christmas tree inside; you could feel the cold light going on and off, all the branches filled with invisible snow. He listened to the faint push of his soft shoes through autumn leaves with satisfaction, and whistled a cold quiet whistle between his teeth, occasionally picking up a leaf as he passed, examining its skeletal pattern in the infrequent lamplights as he went on, smelling its rusty smell.

"Hello, in there," he whispered to every house on every side as he moved. "What's up tonight on Channel 4, Channel 7, Channel 9? Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?"

The street was silent and long and empty, with only his shadow moving like the shadow of a hawk in mid-country. If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he imagined himself upon the center of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona country with no house in a thousand miles, and only dry riverbeds, the streets, for company.

"What is it now?" he asked the houses, noticing his wrist watch. "Eight-thirty P.M. Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?"

Was that a murmur of laughter from within a moon-white house? He hesitated, but went on when nothing more happened. He stumbled over a particularly uneven section of walk as he came to a cloverleaf intersection which stood silent where two main highways crossed the town. During the day it was a thunderous surge of cars, the gas stations open, a great insect rustling and ceaseless jockeying for position as the scarab beetles, a faint incense puttering from their exhausts, skimmed homeward to the far horizons. But now these highways too were like streams in a dry season, all stone and bed and moon radiance.

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He turned back on a side street, circling around toward his home. He was within a block of his destination when the lone car turned a corner quite suddenly and flashed a fierce white cone of light upon him. He stood entranced, not unlike a night moth, stunned by the illumination and then drawn toward it.

A metallic voice called to him:

"Stand still. Stay where you are! Don't move!"

He halted.

"Put up your hands."

"But —" he said.

"Your hands up! Or we'll shoot!"

The police, of course, but what a rare, incredible thing; in a city of three million, there was only one police car left. Ever since a year ago, 2130, the election year, the force had been cut down from three cars to one. Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets.

"Your name?" said the police car in a metallic whisper. He couldn't see the men in it for the bright light in his eyes.

"Leonard Mead," he said.

"Speak up!"

"Leonard Mead!"

"Business or profession?"

"I guess you'd call me a writer."

"No profession," said the police car, as if talking to itself. The light held him fixed like a museum specimen, needle thrust through chest.

"You might say that," said Mr. Mead. He hadn't written in years. Magazines and books didn't sell any more. Everything went on in the tomblike houses at night now, he thought, continuing his fancy. The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their expressionless faces but never really touching *them*.

"No profession," said the phonograph voice, hissing. "What are you doing out?"

"Walking," said Leonard Mead.

"Walking!"

"Just walking," he said, simply, but his face felt cold.

"Walking, just walking, walking?"

"Yes, sir."

"Walking where? For what?"

"Walking for air. Walking to *see*."

"Your address!"

"Eleven South St. James Street."

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"And there is air *in* your house, you have an air-*conditioner*, Mr. Mead?"

"Yes."

"And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?"

"No."

"No?" There was a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation.

"Are you married, Mr. Mead?"

"No."

"Not married," said the police voice behind the fiery beam. The moon was high and clear among the stars and the houses on the street were gray and silent.

"Nobody wanted me," said Leonard Mead, with a smile.

"Don't speak unless you're spoken to!"

Leonard Mead waited in the cold night.

"Just walking, Mr. Mead?"

"Yes."

"But you haven't explained for what purpose."

"I explained: for air and to see, and just to walk."

"Have you done this often?"

"Every night for years."

The police car sat in the center of the street with its radio throat faintly humming.

"Well, Mr. Mead," it said.

"Is that all?" he asked politely.

"Yes," said the voice. "Here."

There was a sigh, a pop. The back door of the police car sprang wide. "Get in."

"Wait a minute, I haven't done anything!"

"Get in."

"I protest!"

"Mr. Mead."

He walked like a man suddenly drunk. As he passed the front window of the car he looked in. As he had expected, there was no one in the front seat, no one in the car at all.

"Get in."

He put his hand to the door and peered into the back seat, which was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there.

"Now if you had a wife to give you an alibi," the iron voice said to him. "But —"

"Where are you taking me?"

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The car hesitated, or rather gave a faint whirring click, as if information, somewhere, was dropping card by punch-slotted card under electric eyes. "To the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies."

He got in. The door shut with a soft thud. The police car rolled through the night avenues, flashing its dim lights ahead.

They passed one house on one street a moment later, one house in an entire city of houses that were dark, but this one particular house had all its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness.

"That's *my* house," said Leonard Mead.

No one answered him.

The car moved down the empty riverbed streets and off away, leaving the empty streets with the empty sidewalks, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night.

The Two Magicians

Delrio tells of a contest betwixt two Magicians in this manner: The one had stolen a fair and beautiful maid, had mounted her behind him upon a wooden horse, and so rode aloft with him in the air. While they were thus on their journey, the other Magician was at that time at a noble feast in a castle in Burgundy; and being sensible of their flight by the castle, he by his charms compels the ravisher to descend and, to the view of all, presents him in the court of the castle, looking sadly, and not able to stir, together with his blushing prize. But the ravisher was not wanting to himself in this exigency, but privately enchanted him that had thus found him, and, as he was looking from the high window of the castle into the court, he fitted his head with so large and spreading a pair of horns, that he was neither able to pull in his head from betwixt the strong iron bars, nor durst he cast himself down from so high a place. Being therefore thus horned, he was compelled to enter into an agreement with the other, and recalling his charm, suffered him to depart with his prey, involved in a hollow cloud; as also the other suffered him to cast his horns and return to the feast, not without great laughter of the company that was present.

— Nathaniel Wanley, *The Wonders of the Little World*, 1678

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Kenneth H. Cassens, holder of various mechanic's ratings, a sometime farmer, sailor, foreman in a chemical plant and now, at last, a writer, is a resident of Maine. He would have us believe that New Englanders in general, and Mainelanders in particular, are a cautious, conservative lot, not given to such blithe boasting about their climate as are, let us say, the citizens of Los Angeles. On the other hand, he claims that the Maine air is especially salubrious for the giant annelidae *of Burma, allowing one such, a charming worm named Cyril, to achieve a length of nearly twenty feet! (Even a Texan might raise his eyebrows at that.) Well, we, at least, concede Mr. Cassens' claim — so convincing is his tale of the versatile Cyril, who could do the family wash, sing baritone and solve all matrimonial problems, including his own.*

The Lonely Worm

by KENNETH H. CASSENS

THE cackling of hens in the long barn, remodeled into a modern poultry house, was an obbligato to the whicking of the stone against the scythe-blade, already sharp enough for shaving. Hubert Dorry, tall in his streaked and faded dungarees, left off his rhythmic stoning to look at Sabina Joyce with mournful brown eyes. Sabina leaned her basket of groceries on the picket fence, smiling at Hubert.

"Hi, Hube," said Sabina cheerily, her blue eyes tender and her cherry-red lips faintly pursed. "My, I certainly wish I could get my wash as white as yours. I just can't get the time, running that monstrous place of mine all alone." There was more than faint wistfulness in the word "alone." "How do you manage it, Hubert?" she asked.

Hubert leaned on his scythe-snath, wagging the blade a bit in the dewy grass as he yearned at Sabina.

"It's Glosso," replied the young poultryman, his voice as mournful as his loneliness-haunted eyes. "Glosso, elbow grease, and Cyril. He helps, you know."

Fanny, the yellow-and-white cat, rubbed against her master's lean legs, purring. Three kittens rolled and tumbled in the sparkling sunshine, inter-

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rupting their leaping on each other to chew at the tender grass or to sink impertinent claws in Fanny's outraged tail.

"My, that Cyril certainly is a wonderful worm," agreed Sabina Joyce. "I'll just bet you're mighty glad you ever brought him home. He was over to my place yesterday afternoon, and I gave him a piece of apple pie. Cyril looked at me with such gratitude on his pointed little face that I just knew he wished he could speak."

Hubert looked around quickly, shooing a kitten away from the scythe-blade with a warning foot.

"Cyril can speak," murmured Hubert after his cautious glance for possible eavesdroppers. He immediately wished he had kept his secret, but went on. "Sabina, you won't tell anybody else, will you? People might think I was crazy from living alone, or something, if they knew I was talking with a worm. Even if he is twenty feet long."

A frown creased Sabina's forehead. "Hubert, you wouldn't be . . . well . . . getting a little queer, would you? All alone with just your worm and your cats, I mean? I — I'd make almost any sacrifice to help you keep —"

A bell shrilled within the blue-trimmed white frame house, one long and three shorts. At the same moment a shrill whistle sounded.

"'Scuse me, Sabina," apologized Hubert. "That's my ring, and Cyril wants me, too. This tubful of clothes is done, and he wants me to run them through the wringer. I think Cyril is still a little afraid of getting his tail caught.

Sabina turned away, doubt in every line of her back. Hubert trotted to the spruce little shed, a dazed glow in his face, and ran for the clamorous telephone.

He was back in a moment.

"Wrong number, Cyril," he said. "Gosh, Cyril, I'm a lucky guy, having you for a pet worm, and Sabina Joyce living next door. If I could just get up courage to . . . shucks, I couldn't ask her to . . . she wouldn't ever say yes if I did."

"To what, Hube?" asked Cyril, stretching his slender neck so his photo-sensitive rings could peer into Hubert Dorry's pensive face.

"You wouldn't understand, being a worm and not a man like me," sighed Hubert.

"Wouldn't I, Hube?" asked Cyril softly.

"Well . . . you've learned a lot, Cyril, since I brought you home from Burma, wrapped in damp moss, in my pocket. You were such a cute little fellow, just three inches long; and I had a heck of a time keeping you out of sight during inspections. But this Maine air sure seems to agree with you

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now — your pa and ma were only eight feet long, and you're nineteen feet ten and a quarter inches."

A kitten touched Cyril's tail with an experimental paw, and was rolled across the floor in a bristling, spitting ball. Hubert cranked at the old fashioned wringer, careful not to catch any part of Cyril's slender length between the rollers. The clean clothes folded over whitely, damp, but ready for the line.

Hubert Dorry bent and picked up an armful, filling a dungaree pocket with clothespins.

But the line, over-stretched in spring showers, gave way under the weight of the clothing before it was half-filled, plunging the clean clothes to the ground.

"Heck!" exploded Hubert, in his most violent cussword. "Now I've got to go to the store and get a new line! I meant to, this morning, but forgot to buy one!"

"Shucks," proffered Cyril in his gentle mooing voice, "I can hold them clothes up easy for you, boss." Curling his tail about one post, Cyril quested with his slender head for the other, and wrapped his neck about its top. "See, Hube?" said the giant earthworm, now stretched out to an abnormal thirty feet.

Hubert could see the sun shining pinkly through the greatly thinned worm; but, not wanting to hurt Cyril's easily injured feelings, began to pin clothes gently on him. He interrupted the task for more than one anxious query; but Cyril assured him each time that he could stand the pressure. At last, the entire small washing was in place, flapping gently in the breeze.

"Hube," said Cyril.

"Does it hurt?" inquired Hubert Dorry anxiously.

"Gosh, no. But — could I have a cigar?" asked Cyril.

Hubert slid the band off, clipped the end, and lighted the cigar before placing it in Cyril's mouth; for the worm could not quite manage the extra puffing it took to get a cigar lighted. Cyril puffed happily; drawing smoke into his many sets of lungs and holding it there, as was his wont. Hubert turned to fill a measure of mash for his layers. A last proud glance at his white washing showed Cyril, pulling happily at his cigar, flapping his length to aid the drying.

A few moments later, Stoneville's inevitable busybody, Bedelia Crouse, was skidding to a halt before the small frame house. Her squinting eyes narrowed to vindictive slits as she stood outside the neatly painted picket fence, a caricature of the womanhood so splendidly represented by Sabina Joyce an hour before. Hands on skinny hips, and an explosive "Well, I never!" emitting through her thin lips, Bedelia stared balefully at Cyril.

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Her gold-rimmed spectacles, glinting dangerously, gave her now widening pale blue eyes an owlish appearance in the shrewish face.

Hubert, just emerging from the barn with its many batteries of setting hens, was confronted by Bedelia, and backed off a step before her fury. "Hubert Dorry!" she snarled. "That poor worm!"

"Cyril?" asked Hubert, in shocked surprise at her vehemence. "Cyril's enjoying himself."

"It's cruelty to annelids!" stormed Bedelia. "I'm going to get the sheriff, I am, and have you inoculated!"

"It's annelidae," corrected Hubert gently. "And maybe you mean incarcerated."

"Don't argue with me, you worm! Don't you dare argue with me!" Bedelia blazed.

Cyril cocked his photosensitive rings toward the sound of the altercation, and, hiccuping gently, emitted a vast cloud of long-harbored blue smoke. Macerated bits of leaf from the chewed end of the cigar descended through the warm air.

Bedelia flinched, gasping in horror. Her thin shoulders came erect with such violence that she seemed in danger of turning wrong side out, with some prospect of improvement. "Hubert!" wailed Bedelia. "He's — he's smoking!"

"He's not overheated," Hubert explained hurriedly. "He's only smoking a cigar. He loves 'em."

"Well, I never!" snapped the angry woman. "I shall most certainly report this! I'm sure he's a minor!"

"He's a miner, all right," agreed Hubert. "Cyril has shafts and tunnels all over the yard, and one of 'em runs under the fence right over to Sabina's."

"I mean he's under twenty-one," stormed Bedelia Crouse, "and should not be given tobacco in any form. As Secretary of the Women's League for Purity and the Abolition of Fun, I want you to know you can't continue such sinful proceedings. That poor worm is entitled to protection, and I intend to do my best to see that he has it! You'll hear from me, I warn you!"

"I have already," mourned Hubert.

Bedelia flounced away, her heels clicking sharply and angrily on the concrete of the front walk.

"My pal," mooed Cyril, quivering happily.

"Always have been, haven't I?" asked Hubert, moodily watching the clothes dance.

"She called you a worm," sighed Cyril ecstatically.

"Yeah — that's what a woman calls a man, to berate him, sometimes," admitted Hubert thoughtlessly.

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"What does 'berate' mean?" asked the annelid quickly.

"Ooops!" grunted Hubert, catching himself just in time. "Berate means — er — to praise a man for meritorious and sympathetic conduct toward other creatures."

"I love you, Hubert," sighed Cyril, reaching out with his sinuous head for Hubert's shoulder. "You lie so like a gentleman. If that was praise, I'm a boa constrictor."

"Look, Cyril," interrupted Hubert. "I'll have to get these clothes off you before Delie gets here with the sheriff. She'll have me in the hoosegow before you can say 'Jack Robinson.' "

"Jack Robinson," quoted Cyril promptly. "She didn't. See, there's nothing to be afraid of."

"You're too literal minded," protested Hubert, dodging a fall of ashes from the half-chewed, half-smoked cigar. A large green tear oozed from Cyril's photosensitive rings. "But you're a wonderful worm," added Hubert hastily.

"I like this," sighed Cyril, puffing and chewing happily. "It's fun. I don't mind being a clothesline." He flapped his long length dreamily, the clothes swaying with his movements. "Why should what's-her-name object to this, pal?"

"If I could explain women," mourned Hubert, "I wouldn't be conversing with a worm. These clothes are almost dry, though, anyway. I might as well take them down."

Blinking his photosensitive rings contentedly, Cyril chewed and puffed his way to the point where the cigar was growing uncomfortably warm, then spat out the remainder. The stretched worm hummed a subterranean melody all his own, shuddering as if he were almost asleep when Hubert removed the last flapping dishwiper from his living improvised line.

"Ho, hum," yawned Cyril. "I guess I'd better tuck away in a burrow for a little sack duty. Quite a day for me; I'm usually stowed away by ten a.m. See you about six or six thirty, huh, Hube?"

"Eighteen-thirty," corrected Hubert. "It's funny, Cyril, what a time you have in catching on to the Army way. Oke — see you then, if I'm not in jail."

Cyril slithered into a three-inch burrow on his way to unknown recesses of the spring-warmed earth. The worm, however, had barely vanished from sight when Bedelia Crouse stopped her jalopy outside the half-closed gate. Trailed by an apologetic and reluctant deputy, her lean jaw thrust out grimly, Bedelia flung the front gate open. Her hair, iron-gray where it had escaped from her dowdy hat, was electric with excitement as she stalked in for the kill.

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"Now, Hubert Dorry," she cried, her slightly hooked chin thrust belligerently forward, its six or seven hairs almost jaunty, "We'll see about this mistreatment of defenseless creatures. Hack Benner, you serve that warrant, you hear?"

Hubert stared down at the pair. Bedelia with her high-buttoned shoe planted on the bottom step, Henry K. Benner standing guiltily behind her, his faded blue eyes miserable.

"What's up, Delie?" asked Hubert innocently. "I never had any trouble with my neighbors, and don't want any."

"You know very well what's up, Hubert Dorry," snarled Stoneville's busybody, shaking a scrawny, veined finger at the poultryman, her face looking like a slightly dulled hatchet. "Your outrageous treatment of that poor worm, that's what's up!"

"I see your foot's up on my step, Delie," said Hubert softly. "And I'd suggest you get it off right now, and out of my yard, if you're going to talk like that."

"Here I stand," proclaimed Bedelia, like a car crouched at a stop sign, snarling at boulevard traffic. "And here I shall continue to stand, until I see justice done!"

"Henry," inquired Hubert, masking a grin, "what's this about your serving a warrant?"

"I gotta arrest you, Hube," groaned Hack Benner, reluctance in every line and tone, "for cruelty to animals. I'm awful sorry, Hube. But I got my duty by the law."

"Hack, does the law forbid you to make more than one arrest at a time?" inquired Hubert with a sidelong glance at the fuming and unattractive Bedelia Crouse.

"Nothin' to forbid it that I can think of, Hube," replied Hack, brightening.

"I have a lady trespasser on my land, who's been warned off in your presence," continued Hubert Dorry. "You heard me warn her, didn't you? And she refused to go."

"Sure did," agreed Hack. "I heard it all, Hube. I heard every word she said."

"Now, just what's the law in that case?" asked Hubert, obviously enjoying the situation.

Henry Benner's blue eyes grew coldly official as he examined Bedelia Crouse, lips twitching, but his face masklike in its sternness. "You mean," he asked hopefully, "that you're making a complaint, that you want me to arrest Delie, here, for trespassing?"

"It'd be an awful shame for me to be in that cold calaboose all alone,"

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said Hubert gently. "And about that warrant — cruelty to animals, you said?"

"That's right, Hube. You want I should arrest this here trespasser right now?"

Hubert's grin grew wide as Bedelia's lean jaw sagged.

"Could be," he temporized. "Cruelty to animals, huh? I haven't an animal on the place, except Fanny and her three kittens. Do they look like they was suffering any great amount, Hack?"

Fanny rubbed pleasantly against her master's legs, purring. One kitten chased the other two across his toes, and the trio rolled off the steps, squabbling amicably.

"It was your worm," said Bedelia Crouse weakly, "that you was cruel to. You used him for a clothesline."

The deputy's handcuffs clicked suggestively. "Now this here trespasser," he began.

Hubert interrupted him quickly. "Bedelia, do you feel all right?" the poultryman asked solicitously. "A worm, being used for a clothesline? You sure you don't mean on the end of a fishline, Delie?" Bedelia stared at Hubert, fright growing in her thin face. "Hack," continued Hubert Dorry, "what kind of a story do you think that would make, in court? It would sound like some of us — and I don't mean you and me — was a might tetched in the head, wouldn't it?"

"It sure would," agreed Hack Benner promptly. "I wouldn't want to go before Judge Fickett with no fish . . . no worm story such as that. I surely wouldn't."

"I withdraw my complaint," quavered Bedelia weakly. "But I saw what I saw, with my own eyes."

Hack straightened, every inch a deputy sheriff, as he touched the woman's arm. "You come along peaceably now, Delie," he said. "And we'll see about this charge of trespassing."

"Don't let Judge Fickett give her more than ninety days, Hack," suggested Hubert. "That'll give you time to catch up on your correspondence, Delie, as Secretary of whatever it was."

"Oh, my goodness!" sobbed Bedelia, almost crumpling to the walk. "Oh, my gracious goodness!"

"On the other hand," mused Hubert, "if I should see you tear up that warrant, Hack, I might forget my charges. I'm not making any promises, you understand. But I just might forget."

"Tear it up," wailed Bedelia. "Tear it up, Mister Benner. I — I really must be going!" The starter whined, and the jalopy jumped a full six feet as it got under way.

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"First time Delie ever called anybody but a minister 'Mister' in thutty years," grinned Henry Benner. "So long, Hube." With a grin and a wave, the deputy was gone.

But Hubert Dorry was sighing, not smiling, as he turned to enter the house, trailed by Fanny and her kittens. The cat jumped lightly into her blanket-padded carton, and rolled to accommodate the appetites of the three active kittens.

"Fanny," mourned Hubert, "I don't know but what Sabina may be right. A person gets queer, living alone — look at Bedelia, now, if you can stand to. I sure wish I could get up courage to speak to Sabina. I'm twenty-five, and she's twenty-three — that's about perfect, s'far's ages go. And she's alone, like me. Gosh . . . Fanny, what did your husband say to you, before . . . before. . . ."

"Mwowwrrrr?" asked Fanny, inquiringly.

"I s'pose that's what he said," agreed Hubert, his face reddening. "But that would hardly do, with Sabina."

The only trouble with Cyril's singing was that the worm could never quite remember the words of the songs he sang. But when Hubert sat on the steps at twilight, as he often did, and sang softly, Cyril was wont to curl up beside him. Then the pair would sing pleasing duets, Hubert's tenor nicely balanced by the worm's weak but true-toned baritone.

"Sing something with moonlight in it," suggested Cyril, crawling from his burrow that evening, to join Hubert on the back stoop. "I think moonlight's out of this world. That's when all the earthworms come out, and. . . ." Cyril heaved a mighty sigh. "I'd better stop thinking such useless thoughts. There's no other worm of my kind, in this soil — there isn't a one more than eight inches long, that I've met so far."

Hubert struck up a tune, and they sang "Santa Lucia" very nicely and well. Hubert took the tenor, while Cyril carried the melody; sometimes fumbling the words, but getting the notes just as true as though he had tonsils. Then they sang "Swanee River," and Cyril's rings glowed palely while he shed a greenish tear at thoughts of the old worms at home in distant Burma.

It was there, a few minutes later, that Sabina found them, now singing "Ciribiribin," with Cyril providing the echoes. She came up the walk, lovely in the dusk, the rising moon red behind her. She smiled at sight of Cyril, curled happily beside his adored master.

"I heard the singing," she said, "so I came over to enjoy it. Don't stop!"

"Aw, gosh," objected Hubert, squirming in embarrassment. "I can't sing, not with you around."

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Cyril was humming softly, the tune being "Juanita." He fumbled for the words; and when they became audible to his friends they were all wrong.

"'Bina, Sabina," he sang, "how I long to make you mine. 'Bina, Sabina — heck, boss, how does that go? You taught it to me a couple of nights ago. You remember."

"Why, Hubert, you old romanticist!" cried Sabina Joyce, her eyes sparkling. "Did you send Cyril over to sing that to me, yesterday? He forgot to do it, when I gave him that piece of apple pie."

"Mighty good pie," said Cyril, smacking his lips to forestall Hubert's agitated denial. "Sit down, Sabina — there's room for all of us." Cyril moved over to the end of the step, so the girl would have to sit between him and Hubert. "C'mon, Sabina; sit down."

Sabina smoothed her skirt, and sat gracefully between the pair. Hubert, glowing at about nine hundred degrees Kelvin, would have gotten off the stoop immediately, but Cyril suddenly cried "Ouch!" and looped several coils of his long body over Hubert and Sabina, tightening them at once. "Ouch!" he repeated. "One of those confounded, silly little kittens bit my tail!"

The startled Hubert found one arm entangled about Sabina, and hers twined about his neck in alarm. Her lips, slightly parted, were scant inches from his . . . centimeters . . . millimeters. He couldn't whistle, even though he wanted to, to call Cyril off. The muscular result, however, was very much like kissing.

Very satisfactorily so.

After that, it was not so much a matter of "what" as it was of "when." And Sabina promptly set a very early date for a positively scrumptious wedding.

When she had finally gone, with Bedelia Crouse and the proprieties vaguely in mind, Hubert, torn between wonder and ecstasy, turned to Cyril. "Old pal," he said, "I sure will have to do something about those kittens. They'll have to learn to leave your tail alone."

"Shucks, boss," said Cyril, hanging his slender head in shame, "those kittens were asleep all the time. That was my idea."

Hubert looked shocked, then laughed. "Well, I'm glad it turned out as it did," he confessed.

Cyril only looked mournful. He stared up at the moon, his photosensitive rings pale under the flooding light. "Yeh, I know, boss," the worm said dispiritedly, his mouth drawn down. "I know how it feels, even if I'm only a worm. I'm an awfully lonely one, Hubert." Then Cyril slithered away, and Hubert went reluctantly to bed, to dream wonderful dreams.

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With the morning, Cyril had an astonishing request. "Boss," he pleaded when Hubert appeared on the doorstep, "would you do something for me?"

"Anything in reason. Or maybe out of it. Why?"

"I want you to cut me in two, Hube."

"Gosh, no!" protested Hubert. "I couldn't treat my best friend that way, Cyril!"

"Please, boss," begged the worm. "I can't go on this way, seeing the cat and the kittens, the hens and the roosters and the chickens, the birds, the bees, the flowers, you and Sabina — it's awful, with me alone, like this!"

"It would be worse than cutting off my own hand!" wailed Hubert.

"Won't you do it for my sake, boss?" pleaded Cyril.

Hubert turned reluctant eyes toward the chopping block, a section of tree-trunk sawed to proper length for such use. The sun glinted from the axe-blade, and from the glittering scythe-blade, propped against a tree just beyond it.

"Cyril," said Hubert solemnly, "I can't do a thing like that!" Cyril stared mournfully from lugubrious phosphorescent photosensitive rings. "I really can't," protested Hubert. "Please don't ask me to."

Walking past the block, Hubert picked up the scythe. When he looked around again, Cyril was gone. He had just begun the rhythmic strokes of mowing, when the telephone shrilled one long, three shorts.

"Darn," muttered Hubert, using his second strongest expletive. He leaned the snath against the apple tree, leaving the blade extended above the grass, in his hurry. The caller was Hack Benner, still chortling over the discomfiture of Bedelia Crouse. Hubert hung up as soon as he could without rudeness to the garrulous deputy, and returned to his mowing.

The scythe had fallen down. As Hubert picked it up, a strange, sticky stain on the blade caught his eye. His jaw sagged. There was a blending of red and green, and bits of gravel as if from a great earthworm's gizzard. A closer inspection showed a remnant of annelid-like flesh clinging to the razor-sharp blade.

"Oh, no!" moaned Hubert, putting a hand weakly to his suddenly throbbing forehead. "Cyril — you didn't — you didn't — oh, no!" Hanging the scythe, blade upward this time, in the apple tree, Hubert stumbled across the yard, blinded with tears, looking for the body of his unusual pet and friend. But he could find nothing save a faint trail of the sticky blood. "Some bird, or flock of them, must have carried Cyril off," he mourned.

The Dorry-Joyce nuptials took place ten days later. It was a simple affair, with half the four hundred souls who comprised the village of Stoneville waiting outside the parsonage. There would be no honeymoon; layers and broilers, like time and tide, care little for the supposed necessities of

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impatient or dawdling men. Before, during, and after the ceremony, Hubert was distraught and pale. Despite the many good wishes, a pall of gloom hung impalpably over his head. Sabina, however, was radiant; and it was a happily glowing bride who was carried across the threshold of the little frame house by a sad-faced gloomy groom.

"Hubert, where's Cyril?" asked Sabina suddenly.

"Cyril?" gulped Hubert. "I — gosh, Sabina, I can't — I mean, I don't know just how to tell you."

"You won't have to tell her a thing, boss!" came a cheery greeting from the doorway. Hubert gulped, started, and swung back to stare at a slender head poking past the jamb of the open door. "I'm back," the worm assured him. "Back with a brand-new tail, and something else. Look!"

A second head was beside the first; equally sinuous, but with a new look about it, a feminine look. A faint green blush mantled her photosensitive rings as Hubert and Sabina went wonderingly to the doorway. Cyril, greatly shortened but with a tail as new as ever, was paralleled by another giant annelid whose head swung gently forward from a wound-scar that matched the one that began Cyril's new and shortened tail.

"Hubert and Sabina," explained Cyril, "this is Cyrilla. This is the little woman. And will we ever be happy!"

"Gee," sighed Hubert, turning to kiss Sabina so firmly that she gasped and clutched at the doorway, "that's great! I'd forgotten about worms doing . . . er . . . what they do, when they're cut in two, I mean. Cyril, have a cigar."

Cyrilla extended a slender, inquisitive neck. "Woman, you let me catch you smoking," warned Cyril sternly, "and I'll . . . I'll. . . ."

"Sick Bedelia Crouse onto you," suggested Sabina, her eyes twinkling.

"After all," protested Hubert gently, joy in his face, "Cyrilla has smoked exactly as much as you have, Cyril."

"It's just a matter, boss, of seeing who wears the pants," mooed Cyril sternly. "And I wear 'em in this family. You hear me, Toots?"

"Come away, Hubert," suggested Sabina. "I know Cyril and Cyrilla need a little privacy. I won't tell Bedelia about them, like I did about Cyril and you." Her eyes widened suddenly, as she realized the enormity of her admission. "I mean," she faltered, "I had to do something to jolt you out of your rut, to put you where you'd need help, so you'd ask me. . . . I mean. . . . Bedelia. . . ."

"Bedelia," said Hubert sternly, looking down at his bride, "can go to Borneo. And she can get her a worm of her own." Then he grinned, his arms open.

But they were neither lonely nor empty, for long.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

WE'VE PREVIOUSLY expressed in this department the opinion that Robert A. Heinlein knows more about the technique of writing true *science* fiction than any other contemporary author. And what is perhaps most gratifying about Heinlein's work is that he's not content to sit back and be venerated as The Old Master; he's still constantly learning, expanding the scope of his own writing and of the field itself.

You can observe this development of Heinlein nicely in three recent books. THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW (Signet) is a retitled reprint of his 1941 SIXTH COLUMN, a fine specimen of serious pulp science fiction. THE GREEN HILLS OF EARTH (Shasta) contains two excellent stories from the same pulp era, and eight from Heinlein's "slick" period of 1947-49. These slick stories are apt to stir up controversy among purists of science fiction; essentially they're ordinary magazine stories set in the future, with the scientific element more in the meticulously detailed background than in the story proper. But those backgrounds contain more successful fictional integration of science than you'll find in a year's crop of the average "science fiction" stories; and the simple emotional plots made it possible for Heinlein to reach millions of new readers. The merits of this second volume of the "Future History" series may be strenuously debated as against the merits of other Heinlein; compared with the field as a whole, it's still an outstanding book, and such tales as the title story and *It's Great to Be Back* can deservedly be considered classics in a new form.

The newest Heinlein marks yet another departure. In THE PUPPET MASTERS (Doubleday) he's chosen a theme which old-line aficionados will consider tired and even tiresome: the invasion of earth by interplanetary parasites who fasten upon men and convert them into soulless zombies. But in the development of this theme he displays not only his usual virtues of clear logic, rigorous detail-work and mastery of indirect exposition, but also something new: a startling fertility in suspense devices, a powerful ingenuity in plotting (hitherto his weakest point), to make this as thunderously exciting a melodrama of intrigue as you'll find outside of an early Hitchcock picture. Science fiction is said to be competing with the mystery-suspense story for popular favor; and Heinlein has brilliantly combined the virtues of both fields in one book.

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Spy intrigue, on a vast scale covering a gaggle of parallel worlds, is also a feature of Sam Merwin Jr.'s THE HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS (Doubleday). The *If* theme is admirably handled (especially in the creation of an America resulting from a successful Burr conspiracy); the suspense plotting is good (despite an annoying ending); and the writing is the best that Merwin has yet published.

A curious blend of science fiction and the detective story is Kenneth Fearing's LONELIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD (Harcourt, Brace) — so curious, in fact, that it's hard to say whether it quite falls into either field. It's still to be recommended to anyone interested in acoustics and cybernetics, in offbeat melodrama, or in unusually good prose.

The science fiction anthology is still very much with us. Perhaps the year's highest consistent level of literacy and imagination is attained in Fletcher Pratt's WORLD OF WONDER (Twayne), with particularly fine previously unreprinted stories by Chandler, Heinlein, Merril, Piper and MacDonald, and Mr. Pratt's critical comments are unusually perceptive; but unfortunately over 50% of this otherwise outstanding collection is already available in other anthologies of imaginative literature.

Your editors were too closely involved in the preparation of Raymond J. Healy's NEW TALES OF SPACE AND TIME (Holt) to give a strictly objective critique; but we can stress that it avoids completely the cannibalism of anthologists as exemplified in the Pratt. No story in the Healy collection has appeared before *in any form;* all were written specifically for this book, by such topflight science fiction names as Bradbury, Asimov, Bretnor, Neville, Heard and van Vogt.

This business of previous reprintings is bothersome too in collections by individual authors, such as Fredric Brown's SPACE ON MY HANDS (Shasta), in which four of the nine stories are probably already on your shelves in hard covers; but such superlative old items as *Star Mouse* and new ones as *Come and Go Mad* make it a volume of unusual distinction.

Another topnotch collection of science fiction short stories is the late Malcolm Jameson's BULLARD OF THE SPACE PATROL (World), a noble blend of detailed gimmickry and clever plots with a fine characterization of the men and traditions of the Space Navy of the future. An important reissue among shorts, particularly for its classic title story, is John W. Campbell Jr.'s WHO GOES THERE? (Shasta).

For short stories of pure fantasy in the best Irish tradition, by all means look into W. B. Ready's THE GREAT DISCIPLE AND OTHER STORIES (Bruce). Much of the book is straight realism (and excellent); but as jam between the slices of life you'll find some extraordinary retellings of the greatest legends of Ireland (one of which we bring you elsewhere in this issue).

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In non-fiction, the most interesting recent book is nominally a juvenile: ROCKETS, JETS, GUIDED MISSILES AND SPACE SHIPS by Jack Coggins and Fletcher Pratt (Random). Written and illustrated with intelligence and extreme clarity, and with its accuracy guaranteed in a foreword by Willy Ley, this is urgently recommended to all adult science fiction readers (and writers) who may find Ley's own definitive book on rockets too long or Arthur C. Clarke's recent study of space travel too technical.

More for the postgraduate is SPACE MEDICINE, edited by John P. Marbarger (University of Illinois). Aside from a beautifully analytical essay on orientation in space by Col. Paul A. Campbell, the articles are chiefly overacademic and heavily Teutonic essays by German experts now working for the USAF, often adding up to the conclusion that we know nothing so far. But what makes the book fascinating is its very existence — the fact that the medical corps of the Air Force is devoting full-time efforts to the study of the effects of Space on the human body. Spies may draw their own conclusions.

Note to serious science fiction collectors: Donald B. Day, former editor of one of the best of all fan-zines, "The Fanscient," is compiling a complete author-title index of all American professional magazines in the field from 1926 to 1950, including over 30,000 entries and a full listing of pseudonyms. The limited edition of 2000 copies will be published in the late spring of 1952 at $6.50; advance orders at the pre-publication price of $5 may be sent now to Mr. Day at 3435 N. E. 38th Ave., Portland 13, Oregon.

Note to un-serious science fiction fans: That up-and-coming member of the New Mexico science fiction colony, Mack Reynolds, has (like his friend and collaborator Fredric Brown) invaded the whodunit field — and with a novel entirely about fans and the 1952 National Science Fiction Convention. As a detective story, THE CASE OF THE LITTLE GREEN MEN (Phoenix) can hardly be taken seriously; but it's lively and, for enthusiasts, highly enjoyable for its many knowledgeable and perspicacious allusions. The site of the 1952 convention, incidentally, was unsettled when Mr. Reynolds wisely set his story in an anonymous city; by now it's been fixed as Chicago. See you there in September?

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Worlds of If

One of the most fascinating themes in science fiction is that of possible alternate worlds — complete histories of mankind developing from some minute alteration in our own past. The most recent example is Sam Merwin Jr.'s THE HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS *(Doubleday, 1951); the most famous is L. Sprague de Camp's* THE WHEELS OF IF *(Shasta, 1949, magazine publication 1940); and the first, so far as most science fiction readers know, is Murray Leinster's* SIDEWISE IN TIME *(Shasta, 1950, magazine publication 1934). Actually there were earlier uses of the theme, notably in the 1931 collection* IF, OR HISTORY REWRITTEN *(of which more later); but we think you may be as astonished as we were to discover that the actual "first" appeared over 70 years ago . . . in "Harper's New Monthly Magazine" for March, 1881!*

Edward Everett Hale (1822–1909) is now chiefly remembered only as the author of that patriotic classic The Man Without a Country. *He deserves better of his countrymen's memory; as writer, editor, clergyman and abolitionist he was, in the just words of the* BRITANNICA, *"active for half a century in raising the tone of American life." A large part of his writing lies in the field of fantasy and science fiction (as early as 1870 he wrote a highly interesting novelet,* The Brick Moon, *describing an artificial satellite of the earth!) — including the extraordinary story here reprinted. It first appeared in "Harper's" anonymously; "I did this," Mr. Hale wrote in 1898, "from simple curiosity to see how the religious press of the country might accept the theological doctrine involved in the story . . . I was sadly disappointed, however. The critics in the religious journals did not know whether the doctrine was right or wrong, because they did not know who wrote the story." For* Hands Off *is, one might say, science fiction in which the science is theology; but even more important to the modern reader, it is a startling and vivid anticipation of what was to become one of the major themes of today's imaginative literature.*

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I. *Hands Off*

by EDWARD EVERETT HALE

I was in another stage of existence. I was free from the limits of Time, and in new relations to Space.

Such is the poverty of the English language that I am obliged to use past tenses in my descriptions. We might have a verb which should have many forms indifferent to time, but we have not. The Pyramid Indians have.

It happened to me to watch, in this condition, the motions of several thousand solar systems all together. It is fascinating to see all parts of all with equal distinctness — all the more when one has been bothered as much as I have been, in my day, with eye-pieces and object-glasses, with refraction, with prismatic colors and achromatic contrivances. The luxury of having practically no distance, of dispensing with these cumbrous telescopes, and at the same time of having nothing too small for observation, and dispensing with microscopes, fussy if not cumbrous, can hardly be described in a language as physical or material as is ours.

At the moment I describe, I had intentionally limited my observation to some twenty or thirty thousand solar systems, selecting those which had been nearest to me when I was in my schooling on earth. Nothing can be prettier than to see the movement, in perfectly harmonic relations, of planets around their centres, of satellites around planets, of suns, with their planets and satellites, around their centres, and of these in turn around theirs. And to persons who have loved Earth as much as I have, and who, while at school there, have studied other worlds and stars, then distant, as carefully as I have, nothing, as I say, can be more charming than to see at once all this play and interplay; to see comets passing from system to system, warming themselves now at one white sun, and then at a particolored double; to see the people on them changing customs and costumes as they change their light, and to hear their quaint discussions as they justify the new and ridicule the old.

It cost me a little effort to adjust myself to the old points of view. But I had a Mentor so loving and so patient, whose range — oh! it is infinitely before mine; and he knew how well I loved Earth, and if need had been, he would have spent and been spent till he had adjusted me to the dear old point of vision. No need of large effort, though! There it was, just as he

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told me. I was in the old plane of the old ecliptic. And again I saw my dear old Orion, and the Dipper, and the Pleiades, and Corona, and all the rest of them, just as if I had never seen other figures made from just the same stars when I had other points of view.

But what I am to tell you of is but one thing.

This guardian of mine and I — not bothered by time — were watching the little systems as the dear little worlds flew round so regularly and so prettily. Well, it was as in old days I have taken a little water on the end of a needle, and have placed it in the field of my compound microscope. I suppose, as I said, that just then there were several thousand solar systems in my ken at once — only the words "then," "there," and "once," have but a modified meaning when one is in these relations. I had only to choose the "epoch" which I would see. And of one world and another I had vision equally distinct — nay, of the blush on a girl's cheek in the planet Neptune, when she sat alone in her bower, I had as distinct vision as of the rush of a comet which cut through a dozen systems, and loitered to flirt with a dozen suns.

In the experience which I describe, I had my choice of epochs as of places. I think scholars, or men of scholarly tastes, will not wonder when I say that in looking at our dear old Earth, after amusing myself for an instant with the history of northern America for ten or twenty thousand of its years, I turned to that queer little land, that neck between Asia and Africa and that mysterious corner of Syria which is north of it. Holy Land, men call it, and no wonder. And I think, also, that nobody will be surprised that I chose to take that instant of time when a great caravan of traders was crossing the isthmus — they were already well on the Egyptian side — who had with them a handsome young fellow whom they had bought just above, a day or two before, and were carrying down south to the slave-market at On, in Egypt.

This handsome youngster was Yussuf Ben Yacoub, or, as we say, Joseph, son of Jacob. He was handsome in the very noblest type of Hebrew beauty. He seemed eighteen or nineteen years old: I am not well enough read to know if he were. The time was early morning. I remember even the freshness of the morning atmosphere, and that exquisite pearliness of the sky. I saw every detail, and my heart was in my mouth as I looked on. It had been a hot night, and the sides of the tents were clewed up. This handsome fellow lay, his wrists tied together by a cord of camel's hair which bound him to the arm of a great Arab, who looked as I remember Keokuk of the Sacs and Foxes. Joseph sat up, on the ground, with his hands so close to the other that the cord did not move with his motion. Then with a queer trick, which

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I did not follow, and a wrench which must have been agony to him, he twisted and changed the form of the knot in the rope. Then, by a dexterous grip between his front teeth, he loosened the hold of the knot. He bit again, again, and again. Hurrah! It is loose, and the boy is free from that snoring hulk by his side. An instant more, and he is out from the tent; he threads his way daintily down the avenue between the tent ropes: he has come to the wady that stretches dry along the west flank of the encampment. Five hundred yards more will take him to the other side of the Cheril-el-bar (the wall of rock which runs down toward the west from the mountains), and he will be free. At this moment two nasty little dogs from the outlying tent of the caravan — what is known among the Arabs as the tent of the warden of the route — sprang after him, snarling and yelling.

The brave boy turned, and, as if he had David's own blood in his veins, and with it the precision of David's eye, he threw a heavy stone back on the headmost cur so skilfully that it struck his spine, and silenced him forever, as a bullet might have done. The other cur, frightened, stood still and barked worse than ever.

I could not bear it. I had only to crush that yelping cur, and the boy Joseph would be free, and in eight-and-forty hours would be in his father's arms. His brothers would be saved from remorse, and the world —

And the world —?

I stretched out my finger unseen over the dog, when my Guardian, who watched all this as carefully as I did, said: "No. They are all conscious and all free. They are His children just as we are. You and I must not interfere unless we know what we are doing. Come here, and I can show you."

He turned me quite round into the region which the astronomers call the starless region, and there showed me another series — oh! an immense and utterly unaccountable series — of systems, which at the moment seemed just like what we had been watching.

"But they are not the same," said my Guardian, hastily. "You will see they are not the same. Indeed, I do not know myself what these are for," he said, "unless — I think sometimes they are for you and me to learn from. He is so kind. And I never asked. I do not know."

All this time he was looking round among the systems for something, and at last he found it. He pointed it out, and I saw a system just like our dear old system, and a world just like our dear old world. The same ear-shaped South America, the same leg-of-mutton-shaped Africa, the same fiddle-shaped Mediterranean Sea, the same boot for Italy and the same football for Sicily. They were all there. "Now," he said, "here you may try experiments. This is quite a fresh one; no one has touched it. Only these here are not His children — these are only creatures, you know. These are not

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conscious, though they seem so. You will not hurt them whatever you do; nay, they are not free. Try your dead dog here and see what will happen."

Sure enough there was the gray of the beautiful morning; there was the old hulk of an Arab snoring in his tent; there was the handsome boy in the dry valley, or wady; there was the dead dog — all just as it happened — and there was the other dog snarling and yelping. I just brushed him down, as I have often wiped a green louse off a rose-bush; all was silent again, and the boy Joseph turned and ran. The old hulk of an Arab never waked. The master of the caravan did not so much as turn in his bed. The boy passed the corner of the Cheril-el-bar carefully, just looked behind to be sure he was not followed, and then, with the speed of an antelope, ran, and ran, and ran. He need not have run. It was two hours before any one moved in the Midianite camp. Then there was a little alarm. The dead dogs were found, and there was a general ejaculation, which showed that the Midianites of those days were as great fatalists as the Arabs of this. But nobody thought of stopping a minute for one slave more or less. The lazy snorer who had let him go was well lashed for his laziness. And the caravan moved on.

And Joseph? After an hour's running, he came to water, and bathed. Now he dared open his bag and eat a bit of black bread. He kept his eyes all round him, he ran no more, but walked, with that firm, assured step of a frontiersman or skilful hunter. That night he slept between two rocks under a terebinth tree, where even a hawk would not have seen him. The next day he treaded the paths along the hillside, as if he had the eyes of a lynx and the feet of a goat. Toward night he approached a camp, evidently of a sheik of distinction. None of the squalidness here of those trading wanderers, the Midianite children of the desert! Everything here showed Eastern luxury even, and a certain permanency. But one could hear lamentation, and on drawing near one could see whence it came. A long procession of women were beating their arms, striking the most mournful chords, and singing — or, if you please, screaming — in strains of the most heart-rending agony. Leah and Bilhah and Zilpah led the train three times around old Jacob's tent. There, as before, the curtains were drawn aside, and I could see the old man crouched upon the ground, and the splendid cloak or shawl, where even great black stains of blood did not hide the gorgeousness of the parti-colored knitting, hung before him on the tent-pole as if he could not bear to have it put away.

Joseph sprang lightly into the tent. "My father, I am here!"

Oh, what a scream of delight! What ejaculations! What praise to God! What questions and what answers! The weird procession of women heard the cry, and Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah came rushing into the greeting. A moment more, and Judah from his tent, and Reuben from his, headed the line

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of the false brethren. Joseph turned and clasped Judah's hand. I heard him whisper: "Not a word. The old man knows nothing. Nor need he."

The old man sent out and killed a fatted calf. They ate and drank, and were merry; and for once I felt as if I had not lived in vain.

And this feeling lasted — yes, for some years of their life. True, as I said, they were years which passed in no time. I looked on, and enjoyed them with just that luxury with which you linger over the charming last page of a novel, where everything is spring, and sunshine, and honey, and happiness. And there was the comfortable feeling that this was my work. How clever of me to have mashed that dog! And he was an ugly brute, too! Nobody could have loved him. Yes; though all this passed in no time, still I had one good comfortable thrill of self-satisfaction. But then things began to darken, and one began to wonder.

Jacob was growing very old. I could see that, from the way he kept in the tents while the others went about their affairs. And then, summer after summer, I saw the wheat blight, and a sort of blast come over the olives; there seemed to be a kind of murrain among the cattle, and no end of trouble among the sheep and goats. I could see the anxious looks of the twelve brothers, and their talk was gloomy enough, too. Great herds of camels dying down to one or two mangy, good-for-nothing skeletons; shepherds coming back from the lake country driving three or four wretched sheep, and reporting that these were all that were left from three or four thousand! Things began to grow doubtful, even in the home camp. The women were crying, and the brothers at last held a great council of the head shepherds, and camel-drivers, and masters of horse, to know what should be done for forage for the beasts, and even for food at home.

I had succeeded so well with the dog that I was tempted to cry out, in my best Chaldee: "Egypt! why don't you go down to Egypt? There is plenty of corn there." But first I looked at Egypt, and found things were worse there than they were around Jacob's tents. The inundation had failed there for year after year. They had tried some wretched irrigation, but it was like feeding the hordes of Egypt on pepper-grass and radishes to rely on these little watered gardens. "But the granaries," I said — "where are the granaries?" Granaries? There were no granaries. That was but a dull set who were in the Egyptian government then. They had had good crops year in and year out, for a great many years, too. But they had run for luck, as I have known other nations to do. Why, I could see where they had fairly burned the corn of one year to make room for the fresher harvest of the next. There had been no Yussuf Ben Yacoub in the ministry to direct the storing of the harvest in those years of plenty. The man they had at the

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head was a dreamy dilettante, who was engaged in restoring some old carvings of some two hundred and fifty years before.

And, in short, the fellaheen and the people of higher caste in Egypt were all starving to death. That was, as I began to think, a little uncomfortably, what I had brought about when I put my finger on that ugly, howling yellow dog of the sleepy Midianite sentinel.

Well, it is a long story, and not a pleasant one; though, as I have said, as I and my companion watched it, it all went by in no time — I might even say in less than no time. All the glory and comfort of the encampments of Jacob's sons vanished. All became a mere hand-to-hand fight with famine. Instead of a set of cheerful, rich, prosperous chiefs of the pasture country, with thousands of retainers, and no end of camels, horses, cattle and sheep, here were a few gaunt, half-starved wanderers, living on such game as they could kill on a lucky hunt, or sometimes reduced to locusts, or to the honey from the trees. What grieved me more was to see the good fellows snapped up, one after another, by the beastly garrisons of the Canaanite cities.

Heaven knows where these devils came from, or how they roughed it through the famine. But here they were, in their fortresses, living, as I say, like devils, with the origins of customs so beastly that I will not stain this paper with them. Here they were, and here they got head. I remember how disgusted I was when I saw them go down in ships into the Nile country, and clean out, root and branch, the Egyptians who were left after the famine — just as I have seen a swarm of rose-bugs settle on a rose garden and clean it out in an hour or two. There was the end of Egypt. Then I watched, with an interest not cheerful now, Dido's colony as she sailed with an immense crew of these Moloch-worshipping Canaanites, and their beastly rites and customs, and planted Carthage. It was interesting to see poor Æneas dodging about on the Mediterranean, while Dido and her set were faring so well — or well they thought it — on the African shore.

I will own I was rather anxious now. Not but what there was something — and a great gaudy city it was — on the slopes of Mount Moriah and Zion. But it made me sick to see its worship, and I stopped my ears with my fingers rather than hear the songs. O God! the yells of those poor little children as they burned them to death in Hinnom, a hundred at a time, their own mothers dancing and howling by the fires! I cannot speak of it to this day. I dared not look there long. But it was no better anywhere else. I tried Greece; but I could make nothing of Greece. When I looked for the arrival of Danaus with his Egyptian arts and learning — Toonh, I think they called him in Egypt — why, there was no Toonh and no Egyptian arts, because these Canaanite brutes had cleared out Egypt. The Pelasgians were in Greece, and in Greece they stayed. They built great walls — I did not see

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for what — but they lived in cabins at which a respectable Apache would turn up his nose; and century after century they built the same huts, and lived in them. "As for manners, they had none, and their customs were very filthy." When it came time for Cadmus, there was no chance for Cadmus. Perhaps he came, perhaps he did not. All I know is that the Molochite invasion of Egypt had swept all alphabet and letters out of being, and that, if Cadmus came, he was rather more low-lived than the Pelasgians among whom he landed. Really, all Greece was such a mess that I hated to follow along its crass stupidity, and the savage raids which the inhabitants of one valley made upon another. This was what I had done for them when I mashed that little yellow dog so easily.

Æneas and his set seemed to prosper better at first. I could see his ships, with the green leaves still growing on the top-masts, hurry out from the port of Dido. I saw poor Palinurus tumble over. Yes, indeed, queer enough it was to have the old half-forgotten lines of Dryden — whom I know a great deal better than Virgil, more shame to me — come back as poor Nisus pleaded for his friend, as poor Camilla bled to death, and as Turnus did his best for nothing. Yes, I watched Romulus and the rest of them, just as it was in Harry and Lucy's little inch-square history. I took great comfort in Brutus; I shut my eyes when the noble lady Lucretia stabbed herself; and the quick-moving stereoscope — for I really began to feel that it was one — became more and more fascinating, till we got to the Second Punic War.

Then it seemed to me as if that cursed yellow dog came to the front again. Not that I saw him, of course. Not him! His bones and skin had been gnawed by jackals a thousand years before. But the evil that dogs do lives after them; and when I saw the anxiety on Scipio's face — they did not call him Africanus — when I looked in on little private conferences of manly Roman gentlemen, and heard them count up their waning resources, and match them against the overwhelming force of Carthage, I tell you I felt badly. You see, Carthage was simply an outpost of all that Molochite crew of the East. In the history I am used to, the Levant of that time was divided between Egypt and Greece, and what there was left of Alexander's empire. But in this yellow-dog system, for which I was responsible, it was all one brutal race of Molochism, except that Pelasgian business I told you of in Greece, which was no more to be counted in the balance of power than the Digger Indians are counted in the balance today. This was what made poor Scipio and the rest of them so downhearted. And well it might. I, who saw the whole, as you may say, together, only, as I have explained, it did not mix itself up — I could see Hannibal and his following of all the Mediterranean powers except Italy, come down on the Romans and crush them as easily as

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I crushed the cur. No, not as easily as that, for they fought like fury. Men fought and women fought, boys and girls fought. They dashed into the harbor of Carthage once with fire-ships, and burned the fleet. But it was no good: army after army was beaten; fleet after fleet was sunk by the great Carthaginian triremes. Ah me! I remember one had the cordage of the admiral's ship made from the hair of the Roman matrons. But it was all one. If it had been Manila hemp or wire rope, the ship would not have stood when that brutal Sidonian admiral rammed at her with his hundred oarsmen. That battle was the end of Rome. The brutes burned it first. They tumbled down the very walls of the temples. What they could plough, they ploughed. They dragged the boys and girls into slavery, and that was the end. All the rest were dead on the field of battle, or were sunk in the sea.

And so Molochism reigned century after century. Just that, one century after another century: two centuries in all. What a reign it was! Lust, brutality, terror, cruelty, carnage, famine, agony, horror. If I do not say death, it is because death was a blessing in contrast to such lives. For now that there was nobody to fight who had an idea above the earth and dead things, these swords that were so sharp had to turn against each other. No Israel to crush, no Egypt, no Iran, no Greece, no Rome. Moloch and Canaan turned on themselves and fought Canaan and Moloch. Do not ask me to tell the story! Where beast meets beast, there is no story to tell worth your hearing or my telling. Brute rage gives you nothing to describe. They poisoned, they starved, they burned; they scourged and flayed and crucified; they invented forms of horror for which our imagination, thank God, has no picture, and our languages no name. And, all this time, lust, and every form of pestilence and disease which depends on lust, raged as fire rages when it has broken bounds. It was seldom and more seldom that children were born; nay, when they were born, they seemed only half alive. And those who grew to manhood and womanhood — only it is desecration to use those names — transmitted such untamed beastliness to those who came after!

One hundred years, as I said. Fewer and fewer of these wretches were left in the world. I could see fields grow up to jungles and to forests. A fire wasted Carthage, and another swept away On, and another finished Sidon, and there was neither heart nor art to rebuild them. Then another hundred years dragged by, with worse horrors, if it were possible, and more. The stream of the world's life began to run in drops, now big drops, with a noisy gurgle; black drops, too, or bloody red. Fewer men, and still fewer women, and all mad with beastly rage. Every man's hand was against his brother, as if this were a world of Cains. All this had come to them because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge.

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No, I will not describe it. You do not ask me to. And if you asked, I would say "No." Let me come to the end.

The two centuries had gone. There was but a handful of these furies left. Then the last generation came — and for thirty years more of murder and fight it ground along. At the last, how strange it seemed to me, all that are left, in two unequal parties, each of which had its banner still for fight, and a sort of uniform as if they were armies, but only four on one side and nine on the other, met, as if the world were not wide enough for both, and met in that very Syria where I had helped Joseph, son of Jacob, to fling his arms round his father's neck again.

Nor, indeed, was it very far from that spot. It was close to the wreck and ruin of the Jebusite city which had been one of the strongholds last destroyed of one of these clans. That city was burned, but I saw that the ruins were smoking. Just outside there was an open space. I wonder if it had a weird, deadly look, or whether the horror of the day made me think so? I remember a great rock like a man's skull that peered out from the gray, dry ground. Around that rock these wretches fought, four to nine, hiding behind it, on one side or the other, on that April day, under that black sky.

One is down! Two of the other party are kneeling on him, to take the last breath of life from him. With a yell of rage three or four of his party, dashing their shields on the heads of the two, spring upon them; and I can see one wave his battle-axe above his head, when —

Did the metal attract the spark? A crash! a blaze which dazzled my eyes, and when I opened them the last of these human brutes lay stark dead on the one side and on the other of the grim rock of Calvary!

Not a man or a woman, nor a boy or a girl, not a single soul left in that world!

"Do not be disturbed," said my Mentor. "You yourself have done nothing."

"Nothing!" I groaned. "I have ruined a world in my rashness."

"Nothing," he repeated. "Remember what I told you: these are — what shall I say? — shadows, shadowy forms. They are not His children. They are only forms which act as if they were — that you and I may see and learn, perhaps begin to understand — only it passes knowledge."

As he spoke, I remember that I moaned and struggled with him like a crying child. I was all overwhelmed by the sight of the mischief I had done. I would not be comforted.

"Listen to me," he said again. "You have only done, or wanted to do, what we all try for at first. You wanted to save your poor Joseph. What wonder?"

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"Of course I did," sobbed I. "Could I have thought? Should you have thought?"

"No," said he, with that royal smile of his — "no. Once I should not have thought it — I could not have thought it — till I, too, tried my experiments." And he paused.

Perhaps he was thinking what his experiments also were.

Then he began again, and the royal smile had hardly faded away: "Let me show you. Or let me try. You wanted to save your poor Joseph — all sole alone."

"Yes," I said. "Why should I not want to?"

"Because he was not alone; could not be alone. None of them was alone; none of them could be alone. Why, you know yourself that not a raindrop in that shower yonder but balances against a dust-grain on the other side of creation. How could Joseph live or die alone? How could that brute he was chained to live or die alone? None of them is alone. None of us is alone. He is not alone. Even He is in us, and we are in Him. But the way with men — and it is not so long, dear friend, since you were a man — the way with men is to try what you tried. I never yet knew a man — and how many have I known, thank God! — I never yet knew a man but he wanted to single out some one Joseph to help — as if the rest were nothing, or as if our Father had no plans."

"I shall never try that again!" sobbed I, after a long pause.

"Never," said he, "is a long word. You will learn not to say 'never.' But I'll tell you what you will do. When you get a glimpse of the life in common, when you find out what is the drift — shall I say of the game, or shall I say of the law? — in which they all and we all, He in us and we in Him, are living, then, oh, it is such fun to strike in and live for all!"

He paused a minute, and then he went on, hesitating at first, as if he feared to pain me even more, but resolutely afterward, as if this must be said:

"Another thing I notice in most men, though not in all, is this: they do not seem at first to understand that the Idea is the whole. Abraham had left Ur rather than have any part with those smoke-and-dust men — Nature-worshippers I think they call them. How was it that you did not see that Joseph was going down to Egypt with the Idea? He could take what they did not have there. And as you saw, in the other place, without it, why, your world died."

Then he turned round and left that horrid world of phantoms, to go back to our own dear real world. And this time I looked on today. How bright it seemed, and how comforting to me to think that I had never touched the yellow dog, and that he came to his death in his own way!

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I saw some things I liked, and some I disliked. It happened that I was looking at Zululand, when poor Prince Lulu's foot slipped at the saddle-flap. I saw the assegai that stabbed him. Had I been a trooper at his side, by his side I would have died too. But no, I was not at his side. And I remembered Joseph, and I said, "From what I call evil, He educes good."

We have mentioned the book IF, OR HISTORY REWRITTEN (*Viking, 1931; published in England as* IF IT HAD HAPPENED OTHERWISE). *Edited by J. C. Squire, this is a collection of historical essays by Belloc, Chesterton, Guedalla, Maurois and other celebrated scholars on such themes as "if Booth had missed Lincoln" or "if Napoleon had escaped to America" (a topic ingeniously revived by Mr. Merwin in the novel cited above). The most brilliant of them all is entitled* If Lee Had Lost at Gettysburg — *written as by a professor living in a world in which Gettysburg was a great Southern victory, speculating on the possibilities of an* if-*world in which it was a defeat (that is to say, our world), and thereby revealing the nature of his own. This small masterpiece was written by Winston Churchill — whom it's an honor to welcome into the gallery of eminent authors of imaginative fiction. At the time that these essays were being serialized in "Scribner's," another noted scholar of the Civil War and profound student of American mores was so influenced by them that he published in "The New Yorker" an* if-*speculation of his own — one of the most perceptive and logical of all such studies in alternate possibilities.*

II. *If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox*

by JAMES THURBER

THE morning of the ninth of April, 1865, dawned beautifully. General Meade was up with the first streaks of crimson in the eastern sky. General Hooker and General Burnside were up, and had breakfasted, by a quarter after eight. The day continued beautiful. It drew on toward eleven o'clock.

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General Ulysses S. Grant was still not up. He was asleep in his famous old Navy hammock, swung high above the floor of his headquarters' bedroom. Headquarters was distressingly disarranged: papers were strewn on the floor; confidential notes from spies scurried here and there in the breeze from an open window; the dregs of an overturned bottle of wine flowed pinkly across an important military map.

Corporal Shultz, of the Sixty-fifth Ohio Volunteer Infantry, aide to General Grant, came into the outer room, looked around him, and sighed. He entered the bedroom and shook the General's hammock roughly. General Ulysses S. Grant opened one eye.

"Pardon, sir," said Corporal Shultz, "but this is the day of surrender. You ought to be up, sir."

"Don't swing me," said Grant, sharply, for his aide was making the hammock sway gently. "I feel terrible," he added, and he closed his eye again.

"General Lee will be here any minute now," said the Corporal firmly, swinging the hammock again.

"Will you cut that out?" roared Grant. "D'ya want to make me sick, or what?" Shultz clicked his heels and saluted. "What's he coming here for?"

"This is the day of surrender, sir," said Shultz. Grant grunted bitterly.

"Three hundred and fifty generals in the Northern armies," said Grant, "and he has to come to *me* about this. What time is it?"

"You're the Commander-in-Chief, that's why," said Corporal Shultz. "It's eleven twenty-five, sir."

"Don't be crazy," said Grant. "Lincoln is the Commander-in-Chief. Nobody in the history of the world ever surrendered before lunch. Doesn't he know that an army surrenders on its stomach?" He pulled a blanket up over his head and settled himself again.

"The generals of the Confederacy will be here any minute now," said the Corporal. "You really ought to be up, sir."

Grant stretched his arms above his head and yawned.

"All right, all right," he said. He rose to a sitting position and stared about the room. "This place looks awful," he growled.

"You must have had quite a time of it last night, sir," ventured Shultz.

"Yeh," said General Grant, looking around for his clothes. "I was wrassling some general. Some general with a beard."

Shultz helped the commander of the Northern armies in the field to find his clothes.

"Where's my other sock?" demanded Grant. Shultz began to look around for it. The General walked uncertainly to a table and poured a drink from a bottle.

"I don't think it wise to drink, sir," said Shultz.

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"Nev' mind about me," said Grant, helping himself to a second, "I can take it or let it alone. Didn't ya ever hear the story about the fella went to Lincoln to complain about me drinking too much? 'So-and-So says Grant drinks too much,' this fella said. 'So-and-So is a fool,' said Lincoln. So this fella went to What's-His-Name and told him what Lincoln said and he came roarin' to Lincoln about it. 'Did you tell So-and-So I was a fool?' he said. 'No,' said Lincoln, 'I thought he knew it.' " The General smiled, reminiscently, and had another drink. "*That's* how I stand with Lincoln," he said, proudly.

The soft thudding sound of horses' hooves came through the open window. Shultz hurriedly walked over and looked out.

"It is General Lee and his staff," said Shultz.

"Show him in," said the General, taking another drink. "And see what the boys in the back room will have."

Shultz walked smartly over to the door, opened it, saluted, and stood aside. General Lee, dignified against the blue of the April sky, magnificent in his dress uniform, stood for a moment framed in the doorway. He walked in, followed by his staff. They bowed, and stood silent. General Grant stared at them. He only had one boot on and his jacket was unbuttoned.

"I know who you are," said Grant. "You're Robert Browning, the poet."

"This is General Robert E. Lee," said one of his staff, coldly.

"Oh," said Grant. "I thought he was Robert Browning. He certainly looks like Robert Browning. There was a poet for you, Lee: Browning. Did ja ever read 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix'? 'Up Derek, to saddle, up Derek, away; up Dunder, up Blitzen, up Prancer, up Dancer, up Bouncer, up Vixen, up —' "

"Shall we proceed at once to the matter in hand?" asked General Lee, his eyes disdainfully taking in the disordered room.

"Some of the boys was wrassling here last night," explained Grant. "I threw Sherman, or some general a whole lot like Sherman. It was pretty dark." He handed a bottle of Scotch to the commanding officer of the Southern armies, who stood holding it, in amazement and discomfiture. "Get a glass, somebody," said Grant, looking straight at General Longstreet. "Didn't I meet you at Cold Harbor?" he asked.

"I should like to have this over with as soon as possible," said Lee. Grant looked vaguely at Shultz, who walked up close to him, frowning.

"The surrender, sir, the surrender," said Corporal Shultz in a whisper.

"Oh sure, sure," said Grant. He took another drink. "All right," he said. "Here we go." Slowly, sadly, he unbuckled his sword. Then he handed it to the astonished Lee. "There you are, General," said Grant. "We dam' near licked you. If I'd been feeling better we *would* of licked you."

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The Listening Child, *the first story published by Idris Seabright (F&SF, December, 1950), was chosen by Martha Foley for her list of distinguished American short stories of the year, and is still often mentioned by our readers for its evocative and haunting quality. Later Seabrights have been no less popular; and this new one, we hope, may prove her most memorable yet. The New Barbarism of a future post-war world has been treated often and at great length; but this brief vignette carries more meaning and poetry than the most detailed extensive studies. As with so much Seabright, you may find it running through your head like an unforgettable minor melody.*

The Hole in the Moon

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

THE MOON, not quite full, was coming up over the Berkeley hills in yellow splendor. There was a big black hole, a flaw, against the bright part, where the first lunar explosion had driven a pit miles deep into the sterile rock. Hovey sat on the doorstep of his shack in the junk yard and watched the moon rising. He was smoking — he had found a dozen cartons of cigarettes in a drugstore on Wednesday — and enjoying it. He was feeling good.

He was lonesome, of course, but that he was used to. He had grown so familiar with the hollow feeling in his chest that he no longer bothered to name it. Besides, what difference did it make? There was nothing for him to do except wait.

And keep on waiting. After the incandescent horror of the first few months of war there had come more subtle thrusts, and then a long, mutual, exhausted silence. Hovey had made his way down the coast from Canada, where he had been stationed, to the junk yard. It had seemed like a place to go to. He had worked there once, in the days when the Eastshore highway had been crowded with traffic, and he had always liked it. On the junk yard side of the fence the huge cubes of compressed, rust-red metal and the corded bundles of newsprint and magazines; on the other side, the highway, with the cars shooting smoothly past all day and the big diesel trucks slipping along at night. Why shouldn't he like the junk yard? It had been something to come back to, a home, homelike. Now the highway was cracked and grass was coming up in the cracks.

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Hovey shifted his position and lit another cigarette. He blew smoke out through his nose. Tomorrow, if he could spare the time from food-hunting, he'd carry a couple of bundles of magazines across the highway and throw them into the water of the bay. Then he'd bring in those fenders from the two cars further down the road. He liked to do things like that. It kept the junkyard from seeming too stagnant. Of course, there was really nothing to do except hunt food and wait.

The night was windless and silent. Somewhere in the yard he heard a scratching of claws that might have been made by a rat. It probably wasn't. Rats rarely came to the junk yard, where there was little to attract them. And besides, there weren't many rats now. They had died from the plagues of which they had been carriers.

The plagues. Were there any women anywhere who weren't infected? Hovey thought not; they had all caught it, every woman; he didn't want to think of it. He sighed and rubbed one hand over his eyes. But that had been the enemy's masterstroke, surely, as good as anything Hovey's own people had ever delivered. To scatter an infection that fastened only on the female half of humanity, an infection that drove them, young or old, modest or wanton, irresistibly toward the male, urged by the inward fire of the disease. . . . Nothing else could so have poisoned human life, could so have maimed the human race.

In women the plague smouldered quietly. It betrayed itself only in their pitted skins, their roughened voices, their cracked lips. But the men who received the virus from them, transmuted by its incubation in their bodies, died quite quickly and, Hovey thought, quite unpleasantly. There was a gangrenous rotting and a smell. No doubt of it, that plague had been the enemy's masterpiece.

Hovey put his cigarette out against the wood of the doorstep. It was time for him to go to bed.

A voice somewhere in front of him said softly, "Dear, are you there, dear?"

Hovey jumped to his feet. His heart was pounding. He felt a horrible fear and a horrible longing. A woman. He picked up a piece of rusted angle iron from the ground and hefted it. He'd kill her if she came near him. He must drive her away. She . . . It had been so many years.

The woman was suddenly visible, stepping, it seemed, into the moonlight from shadow. She had coppery hair, and her skin was white and shining. He had not known she was so near him.

Hovey was trembling. He bit his lips and swallowed. He said, "Go away, you devil. Do you hear me? I'll kill you. Go away." He made a motion with the piece of iron at her.

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She lowered her head, smoothing the skirt of her white print dress. She was wearing high-heeled slippers. She said, in a voice as smooth as cream, "Dear, isn't it really you?"

Hovey panted, "Go away!"

She said, "Oh, no." She moved toward him lightly, floating. He looked into her eyes. He thought — but could you tell colors in the moonlight? — he thought they were blue.

"Oh, no," she repeated softly. "Don't drive me away. I couldn't come back. And you love me, don't you? You want me to stay." Her voice was soft and sweet, almost cooing. He had heard voices like hers, women's voices, years ago on the radio.

Hovey was puzzled. Trembling, he let the iron bar drop on the ground. He stared at her. She smiled at him. Her skin looked smooth and cool and inviting.

"Then you're re — not —"

"Not what, dear? I'm whatever you made me."

He gaped at her a moment more, longing, believing, disbelieving. Then he took her in his arms.

Her skin was cool and glazed as paper. He couldn't hear her breathing; he liked that. The infected women always panted. Under the light print dress her body was young and thin.

When he let her go, he was dizzy. He wanted to hold on to something, to sink down on the doorstep. It had been so many years.

He took her smooth hand and pulled her toward the cabin. In a moment he would cry, make a fool of himself. "Come in," he said, "please come in with me."

She hung back, smiling a little. "You do want me? Really? You love me, dear?"

"Oh, yes." For an instant the storm of desire abated. He breathed deeply. "Who are you? Where did you come from?" he asked.

She shook her head. "You wouldn't understand."

At once he was suspicious and afraid. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded harshly.

"Well," she answered reasonably, "I came from the yard, the junk yard." She was twisting a copper bangle around one wrist. "Partly the place made me, the way hills and big trees make people. And partly you made me, because you were lonesome. You didn't make me very much, though. That's why I'm not strong. I'm not like my sisters. I told you you wouldn't understand."

She was a little crazy, he thought in relief, just a little crazy. She had a right to be, didn't she? Anybody — everybody — did.

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He put his arm around her. At the touch of her body under the thin fabric he felt the fire leap in him again. "Come in the cabin, dear," he said, "please."

She leaned back against his arm and smiled at him. She put her white hands against his chest amorously. "Do you think I am beautiful?" she asked.

"Very. Yes." Again the sweet fire.

"Oh, you should see my sisters!" she replied, laughing. "If you saw them, you would not care for me."

"I only want you. *Please* come in the cabin with me." He pulled at her arm.

"They are really beautiful," she said, as if dreaming. "They are strong, because they come from strong places, and because so many men have loved them. They live in the ruined cities. Their hair is as red as fire, and their skin is rough and pitted like masonry. Or they are black all over, dressed in charcoal, and their hair is coils of oily smoke. They are more beautiful than I. I am jealous. But we are of the same stock."

His arm was still around her, but he no longer felt the contact. His thoughts were coming in pulsations, wild and confused. She was crazy. Her sisters, who had pitted flesh and lived in cities. Many men had loved them. The plague. All women had it. She was crazy, she didn't know what she was saying. What was she trying to say? Who were the sisters she was talking about?

His arm dropped away from her waist. Abruptly he was wild with frustration, with desire and anger and hate. "So it was only a trap?" he said in a breaking voice. "You put cosmetic on your skin; you thought you'd fool me? Make me want you so much I couldn't let you go?"

She did not seem to have heard him. She slipped one hand inside his shirt and caressed the muscles of his chest. "Let's go to the cabin now, dear. I want to. You must love me and make me strong."

He wanted to cry, to hit himself, to throw himself down on the ground. He picked up the angle iron. He said, "Go away. Or I'll kill you. I can do it. Right here, like this."

"No! You mustn't make me go away. You mustn't. I couldn't come back."

He struck at her. She slipped away, into the shadows, and he ran after her. She was hiding; he'd find her, he'd kill her. He wanted to kill her because he wanted her so much.

Her dress fluttered at him from a corded bundle. He ran toward it, weeping, and found a scrap of blotched magazine cover moving on top of the bale. It had looked like the pattern of her dress.

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He stood, shaking and blubbering, trying to think. She must be hiding. She was cruel. He'd get her yet.

Her white hand waved at him from behind a heap of metal. But when he reached it, it was white paper, glinting in the light of the moon. He touched it, unable to believe. It felt cool and glazed.

Her mop of copper-colored hair winked and beckoned. It was here, it was there, no, over there. He ran after it, sobbing and rubbing his eyes. The moon tricked him; when he put out his hand to touch her hair, it was always one of the cubes of rust-red metal that he touched.

He stopped at last, in the middle of the junk yard, sinking down on his knees in fatigue.

He was so filled with bitterness he did not see how he could possibly continue to breathe.

Next day he hunted through the drugstores (the liquor stores had been looted long ago) until he found a carboy of grain alcohol. He brought it back to the shack and drank it, mixed with vanilla extract and water, all that day. He lay on his back on his cot, sipping the mixture and smoking. He did not understand anything. Who she had been, where she had come from, who her sisters were, even whether she had been real — the more he tried to understand these things, the more he was conscious of his corroding, unbearable loneliness.

On the third night the moon was full. It rose higher and higher, a big yellow globe with a black hole in the lower part, like a bite taken out of an apple. Hovey sat on his doorstep in the moonlight, drinking the last of his alcohol and humming an old tune to himself. *Juanita*, its name was. He heard footsteps coming down the highway toward him.

He got up and went to the fence around the junk yard. It was a woman, and when she caught sight of him, she began to talk and gesture. Her voice rasped like unoiled metal, and even from that distance he could see the pitting of her skin.

He opened the gate with a flourish. "Come in," he said to her as she joggled and posed in the moonlight. "Do come in. You're real, anyhow. I won't hurt you. You can stay."

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